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RESPONSES

FROM THE

SACRED ORACLES;

OR,

THE PAST IN THE PRESENT.

BY

RICHARD W. DICKINSON, D. D.,

AUTHOR OF

"RELIGION TEACHING BY EXAMPLE, OR SCENES FROM SACRED HISTORY" ETC.

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P R E F A C E.

We have found in the Past the archetypes of the Present, and seen ourselves in the mirror of Sacred Writ. They to whom reference is made in the following pages, are not fictitious characters. They were men of like capacities and passions with ourselves; and hence all their acts have their counterpart in those of the men of the present day. We have our Cains and Abels, our Naamans and Gehazis, our Ahithophels, Asas, and Amaziahs. We, too, with those that will in turn claim the reader's attention, have the same temptations and trials, the same fears and sorrows, the same weaknesses and unbelief. The relations which they sustained to God and eternity, bind us; the wants and woes of which they were sensible, are common to us, as the descendants of the same parent; and as we, also, by reason of sin, must die, we need, no less than they of old whom God owned as his servants, a heaven-born faith, and a Divine Saviour.

We have, therefore, inquired at the Oracles of God, to ascertain in what light certain characters were regarded, and what were the results of their manner of life and religious practices : and as the Word of the Lord was to them, or the expression of God's will in relation to their actions, such are the responses of the Sacred Oracles to us.

If it be true, that "as in water face answereth to face, so does the heart of man to man," it will, we trust, be equally apparent to the reader before he closes this volume, that "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in *time past* unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these *last days* spoken unto us by his Son."

NEW YORK, *September*, 1850.

RESPONSES FROM THE SACRED ORACLES.

THE SONS OF THE FIRST MAN.

ALL inquiries respecting man are of trifling import compared with his relations to God and futurity. It is certain that as he alone of all terrene existences is gifted with intelligence, he alone can hold communion with an intelligent immaterial Creator. That such a Being exists, the world with its countless appearances of design, all irreconcilable with our experience of accidental effect, distinctly intimates : and, if God's existence cannot be legitimately questioned, it is unreasonable to suppose that he created such a world as this, without any assignable end, or formed man to abandon him to the control of his animal instincts. The simple admission that man is a creature, implies that he was not left to the slow operation of unaided reason to discover the Author and the end of his existence. To have created man, and not imparted to him whatever degree of knowledge was necessary to enable him to perform at once the highest purposes of his being, would have been inconsistent with that benevolent wisdom which the Creator has displayed even in the minutest of his works.

Hence the presumption in favor of an original Revelation to man ; and, by consequence, of the authenticity and genuineness of the Mosaic Record—a record which has all the proof the nature of the case admits of ; which might have been readily compiled from traditional history preserved beyond the Deluge, when the length of antediluvian life rendered the tradition from Adam to Abraham safe in its transmission, and free from corruption ; which, from its extreme antiquity, is essentially independent of all external testimony ; yet, in its principal facts, has more historical and moral, if not more positive and collateral testimony in its favor, than any other events in the annals of the world.

It is foreign from our purpose to investigate its credibility ; this we assume ; not, however, for the purpose of fabricating a theory in religion and morals, but to aid us in an inquiry of transcendent importance.

It must be admitted that man's judgment is apt to be swayed by his early educational impressions ; still, such impressions may be right ; and it is within the province of mind to discriminate between essential principles and adventitious notions ; by a logical process of thought to separate the true from the false, and by the absolute laws of human testimony to distinguish fact from fable. Our prepossessions, if in favor of truth, need but facilitate our inquiries after truth ; and as all spiritual truths disclose deeper relations to the mind when believed from the heart, so our belief in Christianity may lead to the discovery of new arguments in its support, where the skeptic would be blind, or the philosopher could but theorize. Indeed, the darkness of antiquity cannot be

explored without the torchlight of Christianity. It is to the Record of the creation, what science is, in any attempt to decipher the hieroglyphics of Egypt; and whether we would explore the past or pry into the future, alike indispensable as the guide and reward of all our inquiries. Wonderful system! which comprehends the several dispensations of God to man, from the beginning to the consummation of all things! hardly less to be prized for the discoveries which it makes, than for the hopes which it inspires!

Now if man fell from his original estate of moral purity, and provision was made for his final deliverance from the guilt and power of sin through faith in a Divine Redeemer, it were to be presumed that his early history would serve to elucidate matters of such moment to the human family. Should his true history, if such be extant, be wanting in facts to guide inquiry and warrant legitimate conclusions, then, whatever the formula of schools or the deductions of speculative reason, it could not be proved that "by man sin entered into the world, and death by sin." For aught we know to a moral certainty, Death may be in harmony with the original constitution of things—Depravity, the result of circumstances, or the force of association—Religion, the device of kings to secure their ascendancy over the popular will; and the Atonement, a mere fiction of designing priests, availing themselves of natural terrors to enchain the people by bloody rites.

But what the Bible reveals as doctrines to be accredited on the authority of Him who has an inherent right to exact our faith as well as our obedience, the history

of his providence embodies in facts not to be contravened by human testimony, however much they may be perverted by the sophistry of error, or bereft of meaning by erudite fancy.

As, in relation to the being of God, we may reason from cause to effect, or from effect to cause, and by either method arrive at the same conclusion; so, whether we argue from the facts recorded in Genesis to the doctrines taught in Revelation, or from these to those, the same great principles of faith are obtruded on our notice. This constitutes the distinctive feature and practical value of the Scriptures. Other ancient records, though they contain allusions which cannot be explained without supposing that some traditional knowledge of the facts recorded by Moses had been diffused through all early nations, yet are confused, and in some respects contradictory: but the Bible, though it embodies the writings of various minds at different successive intervals, and through the course of four thousand years—from Moses to St. John—is clear in its drift, and consistent with itself. Its facts bespeak the corresponding enunciations of the Divine Mind, and its revealed doctrines presuppose its recorded facts. Its teachings are substantially the same to all who reverently inquire at the oracles of God, and its historical portions constitute but so many facilities for the clearer understanding of the mind of the Spirit; and while the former harmonize with the conclusions of the practical reason, the latter accord with the facts in our own observation and experience.

Other histories differ in their representations of the

Divine Being ; sacred history presents him to us in all the fulness and harmony of his unchanging perfections. So do they unfold different modes, and all alike useless, to propitiate the Divine favor ; but in this, we may observe one and the same design pervading each successive dispensation. All other religious systems leave man where they find him—in his sins ; this finds him a depraved being, and aims to form him “ a new creature.” In other systems the early facts in man’s history are interwoven with fables or couched in myths ; in this all facts are stated in a clear and simple order, with equal brevity and terseness—so vividly and with such an air of truthfulness, that we involuntarily believe, unless swayed in our judgment by the love of forbidden good. In other systems we can with difficulty recognise our own nature ; in this, we see ourselves. Anywhere else we may discern the wants and woes of our common humanity, and man’s vain efforts to devise a remedy and regain Paradise ; but here we discover a Remedy already provided, and a bright pathway to immortality. Whichever way we turn, all is dark and portentous—as though the threatening angel that guarded the sacred enclosure against fallen man’s re-entrance, had cast his appalling shadow over our souls. Wherever we inquire, whether at the pagod of Vishnu, the sphinxes of Egypt, or of the oracle at Delphi, all responses are alike enigmatical and discordant ; but from the Sacred Oracles one and the same voice breaks in clear and authoritative accents on the ear of every serious inquirer : “ I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

If the historical Scriptures could be separated from

the didactic, or were men divested of prejudice against Revealed Religion, they would be studied with deeper interest than the books of Herodotus or the *Iliad* of Homer; regarded as the most ancient and authentic sources of knowledge; and deferred to as final authority in all matters relative to man's early history.

The oldest nations of which we have any account had their respective traditions of the creation. Ancient Mythology abounds in symbols expressive of many of the events recorded in Genesis; ancient poets, also, have sung of the golden age, and philosophers at different periods of the world have theorized respecting the origin of man; but the Bible tells us, in simple and positive terms, that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth—formed man out of the dust of the earth, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, caused him to become a living soul, placed him in Paradise, formed woman to be his helpmeet, and gave him dominion over the beasts of the earth, and the fowls of the air, and the fish of the sea. All people have had some idea of the Fall; and we see that man is not what we can readily conceive a being so endowed with mental and moral capacities might have been. All nature, too, gives signs of woe, as though conscious of having been stricken in mighty wrath by Him who once pronounced her "good." But it is the Bible alone that can tell us when and where the Fall took place, and how the earth came to be cursed for man's sake, and why woman should have sorrow in her conception. We are not insensible to the evils of sin, much less blind to its appalling ravages; and though many have endeavored

to account for the ills which "flesh is heir to" on almost as many different theories, yet the only simple and rational explanation is found in the recorded facts, that disobedience to God involved the penalty of death, and that after Adam had forfeited his right to "the tree of life," he begat a son "in his own likeness."

We observe the great variety of religious systems that have obtained currency in the world, and though they are not equally pernicious, we are tempted to brand them alike false. But when the primeval records of our race are consulted, we find there the prototype of all false religions, as well as that of the only true. If there is evil in the world, it must have had a beginning; so, if there is good in the world, it cannot be without a cause. If any religion be false, some religion must be true; and in either case, each can be traced to its source with as much certainty as we can trace the origin and the fall of man.

In relation to such historical matters as do not necessitate a conclusion in keeping with the doctrines of Revelation, credence is readily secured. Thus, it will not be denied that the division of labor is the great secret of facility and perfection in the arts; that it is better, too, for the success of each member of the community, and for the harmony and prosperity of the whole: but such was the original order of God's providence, as is shown by the fact that Abel was "a keeper of sheep," and Cain "a tiller of the ground,"*—a fact which furnishes an argument in favor of the record itself, and which an impostor who consulted probabilities would

* Gen. iv. 2.

not have stated ; for if God had not interfered, and events had been left to their natural and regular course, the first man and his sons would have been hunters, supported by the produce of the chase, till their increase of numbers forced them first to the regular occupation of shepherds, and afterward to the higher improvements of agriculture.*

It is often observed that there is a natural difference in the members of the same family : the same difference is strikingly apparent in the sons of the first man. It is familiar to observation, that parents are often disappointed in their children ; but this was the bitter experience of the first mother.

We know that it is not well for man to be idle, that idleness is the great foe to our physical and moral well-being ; but here is the Divine appointment that man should “eat his bread in the sweat of his face,” in connection with the fact that the first born into the world were brought up by their parents in habits of industry, and fitted for different but equally honorable and useful employments.†

The history of any barbarous people may teach us, that whenever man is left to the progress of his own experience, he makes but little advance in the knowledge of those arts which contribute to the comforts of civilized life ; and if this be so, the Mosaic record, in representing the primitive state of man as not a savage state, renders it not improbable that men at first were divinely directed, not only to a division of labor, but to the use of brass

* Smith's “Wealth of Nations,” b. 5, c. 1.

† Gen. iii. 19—iv. 2, 3, 4.

and iron—thus coinciding with the conclusions of reason as to the probable manner of life which a wise and good being would suggest to his rational creatures.

Now if such historical statements are worthy of credence because they accord with the teachings of our experience, why not all other statements with which they are inseparably interwoven, and which cannot, by any law of criticism, be expunged from the record, without doing violence to the whole. It is preposterous to regard the Mosaic record as an allegory, and quite as absurd—though great names have honored the exposition—to resolve the facts stated in the first few chapters in Genesis, into myths; unless we are philosophically at liberty to have recourse to such a solution whenever a difficulty arises which we cannot explain, or facts disturb our fond conceits. If it were not wholly improbable that Moses, while professing to relate matters of fact, on the authority of which his own legislative character was founded, would interweave his narrative with allegorical and legendary representations, it is sufficient for us to know that those statements which men, in their superior wisdom, attempt to invalidate, are referred to in other parts of the sacred writings as of historical authority.*

It is clear, from the Mosaic record, that there was as marked a difference in the offerings of Cain and Abel as in their secular employments; in God's consequent dealings with them as in their treatment of one another; in the end of their days as in their dispositions and actions: and if some of the particulars of the record may

* 2 Cor. xi. 3. 1 Tim. ii. 14.

be legitimately rejected as fabulous or even figurative, the rest cannot be received on the authority of Inspiration : and if Cain and Abel were not the sons of Adam, who were their parents ? Whence the first man ? How came the earth to be peopled ? The want of an authentic record of man's primeval state, were presumptive evidence against the existence of a Creator. Certain it is, however, that to reject the Mosaic record is to discard the authority of the whole Bible ; and not only so, it is to reject facts which philosophers cannot dispute without being driven to the most fanciful conclusions ; and which must be admitted, if we would account, with any show of rationality, for the phenomena of the world — man's depravity not excepted. Yet, if this be admitted — and whether Christianity be true or false, it may not consistently be denied while the facts of experience remain — a presumption is at once established in favor of that remedial system which Christianity unfolds.

As Sin and Redemption comprise the leading ideas of the whole Bible, so do the Fall and the Recovery constitute the two cardinal events in man's history : that is, " the death denounced against sin, and the death appointed for the Holy One, who, in the fulness of time, laid down his life to deliver man from the consequences of sin."* The gospel of the grace of God necessarily presupposes man's lapse from his original nature into an estate of sin and misery. Mysteriously difficult as may be the doctrine of original depravity, a right view of the Fall, of its guilt and consequences, lies at the basis

* Magee, vol. i, Dis. 2, p. 33.

of all right views in Christian theology. Strike from the record only a few facts in relation to Adam and his sons, and there can be no clear idea of the Christian system, nor any just appreciation of the nature and design of the Redemption by Christ Jesus. Either the original record is literally true, or Christianity is false.

But not only does the Bible enable us to trace man to his origin ; it shows us that from the beginning he was wont to render homage to his Creator ; and it is remarkable, that the further we go back in profane history, the nearer approach do we find to the pure worship of God.* Even in his fall, he did not lose all consciousness of the claims of God on his devotions and obedience. It may be inferred from the record, that the sons of the first man were trained to religious services ; for it is expressly stated, that “ at the end of days ” — probably on the Sabbath, which was instituted at the close of the six days’ work of creation, they “ brought an offering to the Lord.”† And as we are able to trace the worship of God to the infancy of the world, so even in the record of the earliest acts of religious worship, may we see that God was then, as he is now, a holy and jealous God — satisfied with nothing short of the humble and contrite heart ; and that man might make an offering to God, yet fail of the Divine acceptance.

There was a striking difference between Cain and Abel — a difference in their natural dispositions, rendered greater by the dissimilarity in their habits and pursuits, — all the difference between a wicked and a righteous

* Leland’s *Advantages of Revelation*, chap. xi. Shuckford’s *Connection*, vol. i. p. 304.

† Gen. iv. 34.

man, an infidel and a believer ; the one being proud, selfish, and malevolent, the other humble, grateful, and kind. There was consequently a great difference in their offerings ; Cain's being a general acknowledgment of God as the Creator ; Abel's a sacrifice of atonement, as to an offended lawgiver. The one offered from the persuasion that some act of homage was required ; the other from a sense not only of his indebtedness to the Bounteous Giver, but of his own ill desert and need of pardon. The latter had a reference to God's promise of a Redeemer, as well as to the Divine requirement ; the former merely to his own dependence, and relied therefore on the expression of his gratitude. Hence, he offered of the fruits of the ground ; but Abel brought "of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." Still, there might have seemed to be no essential difference in their devotions, and in either case, the sacrificer himself a truly good man. As we are now unable to discriminate between the hypocrite and the believer in their external religious acts, so the one as well as the other might have assumed the posture and worn the aspect of simple-minded and serious worshippers. But God, who sees not as man sees, knew they were actuated by different principles ; and accordingly it is stated, that while "he had respect to Abel and his offering, to Cain and his offering he had not respect ;" because, "the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord," and "without faith it is impossible to please God."

That the want of faith in "the promised seed" was the especial reason for God's rejection of Cain's offer-

ing, is not a gratuitous supposition. Various explanations have been attempted, yet none but this to which we have referred, will admit of rigid scrutiny. To suppose that the difference in the treatment of the brothers arose from the “different mode of dividing their several oblations,” is to sanction the view which an ancient enemy to Christianity—Julian the apostate—derived from the Septuagint translation, in order to represent the God of the Christians in an unworthy light; or that it was owing to Cain’s not having brought of the first and best of his fruits, as Abel did of the firstlings of his flock, has almost as little support from the text as the fanciful construction of Grotius, that by the *firstlings* is meant the *wool* of the animal, and by the *fat thereof*, the *milk*: with hardly less disregard to the text might we adopt the conceit of Josephus, that “God was more pleased with the spontaneous productions of nature than with an offering extorted from the earth by the ingenuity and force of man.”* Nor could the difference have been owing to their different moral characters, for we have no record of the acceptance of the one and the rejection of the other, separate from the nature and circumstances of their respective oblations; much less, then, to Cain’s design against his brother’s life, for this was formed subsequently to the rejection of his sacrifice. The fact is, the actions of both the brothers in their offerings seem to have been, as even Priestley admitted, of the same nature, and to have had exactly the same meaning. It matters not in what light sacrifices may be regarded—whether as gifts, as federal rites, or as

* Antiq., lib. i. c. 3.

symbolical actions—the brothers appear on the same ground, in the same attitude, and with the same purpose of worshipping Him by whom they had been blessed, in an offering of their respective possessions. There was as clear an acknowledgment of the supremacy and benignity of God's providence in the offering of the fruits of the earth, as in that of the firstlings of the flock; and whether their gifts were equally valuable or not, they were such as respectively belonged to them, and in either offering, the expression of gratitude might have been significant and forcible, and alike pleasing to a being who looks down on the hearts of his worshippers.

Why then should a distinction have been made in their offerings; and how is the difference in the Divine reception of their sacrifices to be explained? Reason cannot answer these questions. All solutions of this difficulty which the unassisted mind has devised, are contradictory and unsatisfactory. It cannot be resolved without the aid of that Volume to which we are indebted for the facts in the case.

We admit, however, that it is contrary to all our pre-conceptions, that such a being as God would transfer the sins of the sacrificer to his sacrifice: no opinion is more arbitrary, or seems to denote grosser superstition; yet all the ancient nations adopted this very notion, and in their desire to appease the Divine wrath, ceremonially devoted some living victim to God, under the persuasion that the sins of the offerers would be imputatively transferred to the victim. How can this be accounted for, unless all nations received the ordinance from some common source? Man's reason does not teach him

that God could delight in blood, or in the fat of slain beasts ; nor does instinct prompt him to spill for his own gratification the blood of an innocent creature ; nor could appetite have dictated such an act before man was accustomed to the use of animal food, and when, on the supposition of animal victims, he must have known that they were to be consumed by fire ; nor could he have been led by a natural principle of association, from the practice of first offering the fruits of the earth to animal sacrifices ; for there is no conceivable transition from the simple and innocent offerings of fruits, to a cruel and unnatural rite. It avails nothing to refer the practice to some unaccountable superstition, because there could have been no superstitions in the world, unless there had previously existed some true religion : nor may we reasonably refer it in the first instance to mere superstitious will-worship ; as such it could not have been acceptable in the sight of God, much less would it afterward have been made so prominent in the divinely authorized ritual of the Hebrews, as to shadow forth the great atoning sacrifice for sin. Until the giving of the Law, no other offering than that of an animal, with the single exception of Cain's, is recorded in Scripture. The sacrifices of Noah and Abraham, and also of Job, were burnt-offerings ; and when the law was promulgated, the connection between animal sacrifice and atonement was distinctly made known by God's own declaration : "The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar, to make an atonement for your souls."*

* Lev. xvii. 11.

Hence the conclusion that Abel's offering was an animal victim, and that it had reference to the sacrifice of our redemption ; and the manner in which it is introduced in the narrative—the allusion to a *stated* time for the performance of the duty—clearly indicates the pre-existence of this rite ; so that what Abel did, Adam must have done.

If it be admitted, then, that the phraseology in which Abel's offering is mentioned, is not conclusive as to the nature of his sacrifice, the fact that his parents were clothed by the Lord God in the skins of beasts, furnishes incidental proof, that in offering an animal victim, he followed their example. To those who have not reflected on this circumstance, the proof may not be obvious. But how came they by their coats of skins ? It is not probable that animals died of themselves, so soon after their creation ; nor that they were slaughtered for food, for the grant of animal food was not till after the deluge ; nor that Adam, without Divine direction, would have ventured to slaughter them for the sake of their skins, if indeed such an idea had occurred to him ; nor that the Lord God ordered them to be slain for such a purpose, when their wool or hair would have answered, and could have been procured without injury to their lives. It follows, then, that they were slain by Divine authority, primarily as victims ; and that the whole of the victim was devoted to the purpose of sacrifice, except the skin, which our first parents were directed to use as covering, and perhaps as a constant memorial of the death which their transgression merited, and of the Divine mercy by which that death was withheld. Hence it is

said that "the Lord God made coats of skins and clothed them;" and hence the appointment under the Levitical economy, that "the priest should have the *skin* of the burnt-offering."*

In view of such considerations, it is unreasonable to regard the institution of sacrifice as a mere human invention which had its origin in anthropomorphic notions of the Deity. Even Priestley, with strange inconsistency, found himself obliged to admit, that "on the whole it seems most probable that men were instructed by the Divine Being himself in this mode of worship, as well as taught many other things that were necessary to their subsistence and comfort."†

If, then, the ordinance of sacrifice may be referred to so early a period in the history of man, it must have been instituted by God in consequence of the fall; nor is it to be presumed that God would have instituted such an ordinance without imparting to fallen man some insight into its nature and design; otherwise he would have been left in ignorance of the mode of his reconciliation with God, and his observance of a rite that he did not understand, instead of being a religious act, would have been an act of superstition. Most probably, therefore, it was explained in connection with the promised seed of the woman: the devotement of an animal victim practically exhibiting the mode in which that mortal part was to be bruised, as the substitute of the sinner. Unless an explanatory revelation had accompanied the first made promise, it is impossible to account for the woman's remarkable declaration on the birth of her first son:

* Lev. vii. 8.

† See his note on Gen. iv. 3.

“I have gotten,” not “*a* man,” but “*the* man;” that is, the God-man, the Angel of Jehovah! and quite as difficult to account for the facts, that even in the gentile world the ordinance of sacrifice was associated with some vague notions respecting a Divine victim. But if Christ was the “Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world,” a memorial was then needed, and none could have been more suitable and expressive than that of animal sacrifice. It was a sacramental memorial answering to the gospel ordinance, to show forth the Lord’s death until he come.

Abel’s offering, therefore, was such as became a fallen creature who acknowledged his apostasy, and felt his need of an atonement; but Cain’s, instead of being a piacular sacrifice, such as had been required by God and established by usage, was simply eucharistic—as to a Being whom he had never offended. Hence Paul not only places the blood of Abel’s sacrifice in direct comparison with the blood of Christ, which he styles pre-eminently “the blood of sprinkling,” and represents both “as speaking good things” in different degrees;* he draws a distinction between the brothers’ respective sacrifices: “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain;”† and why more excellent, but that it was distinguished by faith? What faith?—a general persuasion that God would accept his offering? This cannot be, for the cause of Cain’s disappointment was that his was not accepted. It was expressed, then, by Abel’s bloody piacular sacrifice; and as the Scriptures assign no other object of this faith than the promise of a

* Heb. xii. 24.

† Heb. xi. 4.

Redeemer, his faith implies that its object, as well as the medium of its expression, had been distinctly revealed, and was in effect a prospective faith in the coming Messiah—like that “by which,” as Paul said, “the elders obtained a good report ;” while Cain’s bloodless offering betrayed his unbelief in the need of a vicarious expiation—the inmost sentiment of his heart being, that it was enough for him to thank God for his mercies, not to humble himself on account of his sins, much less deplore his apostasy.

As every one, then, should honor God with his substance according as he has been prospered ; so no one who does not come before him in the name of the great anti-typical Lamb, can scripturally hope in his favor. The condition of our acceptance is virtually the same as when Abel laid the hand of his faith upon the head of the bleeding victim. Since man, by transgressing the Divine law, had exposed himself to the penalty of death, spiritual as well as temporal, no religion could have been suitable to him and his posterity which did not respect the honor of that law, and aim to restore him to the prerogatives and felicities of his original nature. Being guilty, degenerate, ruined, it is certain he can never make satisfaction to Divine justice, nor restore himself to holiness ; and therefore, Christianity, in its remedial and sanctifying agency, is true to man’s condition as a fallen being ; true to the promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent ; true to the great import of the early institution of sacrifice. He whom we regard as the great sacrifice for sin, was announced immediately after man’s fatal apostasy, shad-

owed forth by the piacular sacrifices which relieved the fears and sustained the hopes of successive generations; pointed out by Moses, and with gradually increasing clearness by his successors in the prophetic office; and if our faith is stronger or more clearly defined than Abel's, his was not the less acceptable in the sight of God.

In what way God manifested his acceptance of Abel's offering, is not stated; yet as there was but one sign of the acceptance of such offerings, it was probably by fire coming down from above, and consuming the sacrifice—as, when Moses offered the first great burnt-offerings according to the law; when Gideon offered upon the rock; when David stayed the plague; when Solomon dedicated the temple; or when Elijah put to confusion the worshippers of Baal. To “accept one's burnt-offering” was, according to the Hebrew sense of the phrase, “to turn it into ashes;” whereby it was declared and understood that the innocent was accepted in room of the guilty—the sacrifice having sustained the vengeance that would otherwise have fallen on the sinner. The Divine acceptance of Abel's offering must have been signified in some decided and unequivocal manner. Cain at once perceived that his own was rejected; but, instead of humbling himself on account of his sin, or being angry with himself that he could have presumed to palm such a sacrifice on the holy and heart-searching God, he is strangely out of temper. His hard thoughts of God, his envious if not vindictive feelings toward his brother, may be read in the expression of his fearfully altered countenance.

But God, instead of treating him according to his ill deserts, manifested his forbearance ; instead of rebuking him in sore displeasure, condescended to reason with him ; and in so doing, laid down the essential principles of his moral government—principles by which he himself is necessarily governed in his judgment of men, and which, as he cannot deny himself, they can never violate with impunity.

“ Why art thou wroth ? and why is thy countenance fallen ? ”—God can have no pleasure in his death. Cain shall have no just reason to complain. If he will not listen to the voice of kind expostulation, his conduct will be only the more inexcusable. “ If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted ? ” As though God had said : You blame me for having had respect to Abel’s offering ; but if you had done well, your offering would have been accepted also ; or if you should now bring an offering in penitence and faith, you shall be accepted. There is room for repentance, and hope for the guilty. “ But if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door : ” you will be tempted to greater sins ; you will go on in the error of your ways, nor will you be able to escape the punishment due to your sins : there is an inseparable bond between sin and punishment.

It has been supposed that, as the original word here translated *sin*, may be rendered, in accordance with the tenor of other passages in the Old Testament, a *sin-offering*, or a sacrifice for sin, there was an intimation to Cain of the Divine mercy, on condition of his making a sin-offering in the faith of a Redeemer. Certainly it is not unreasonable to conclude, from God’s approbation

of the one sacrifice and rejection of the other, that he rebuked Cain for not conforming to that species of sacrifice which his brother had offered. We have already seen that the difference in their sacrifices was the ground of that distinction which God made in his treatment of the sacrificers ; and if so, it follows that he enforced the observance of animal sacrifice. The general sense of the passage is, however, that if Cain did as he ought, he would be accepted ; if not, God could not pardon him, nor could he himself arrest the downward course of transgression, or preclude its consequences : and the experience of the world ever since has borne testimony to the fact, that whenever any man does not do as he ought, sin lies at the door. Skeptics do but betray their own ignorance of the natural course of things in this world, or their wilful disregard of the teachings of facts, when they cavil at the Divine authority of the Mosaic record, on the ground that death was made the penalty of merely eating an apple ; and that Cain incurred the Divine displeasure merely because he did not sacrifice a lamb ! Adam's sin was in itself an overt act of rebellion, deranging, so far as its effects might extend, the moral government of the world : Cain's sin was not only the violation of a known injunction ; it implied the questioning of God's right to his obedience, and an impeachment of God's holiness.

The father, by his sin, parted with Paradise ; and the son, by his, parted with peace. The former humbly availed himself of the benefit of the promised seed ; the latter not merely neglected to observe parental precept and example, but showed his disbelief of the Divine

promise, and his dissatisfaction with God's appointed ordinance. The former, notwithstanding his sin, set an example of penitence and faith; the latter, through the pride and selfishness of his heart, instituted will-worship, and by his offering set an example of infidelity, and of insubordination to Heaven's rule. Still, God remonstrated with him; and it is evident from this recorded fact, that notwithstanding his excuseless conduct, he, equally with his brother, might have been at last accepted, had he only repented, and, in the hope of the promise, brought an offering for sin. But in him we have a picture of the woful change which sin had wrought in man's original nature. The fact that Abel's offering was accepted, seems to have stirred up in his bosom every evil passion. He was angry at his brother for having done well; and even the Divine remonstrance, instead of softening his feelings, served rather to exasperate his spirit. This is the not unusual result of expostulation with those who, while conscious of having done wrong, are yet unwilling to do right. God's ministers can do no more than reason with sinful men, and warn them of the error of their ways; and if they will not heed the voice of faithful reproof and affectionate warning, their guilt is aggravated, as Cain's was, and their case may be quite as hopeless.

We are prone to think that all is well with one, so long as he is attentive to the duties of his calling. Man's relations to his God are practically deemed of no importance compared with his relations to the community. He may live in the neglect of all religious duties, yet feel himself not unworthy of the Divine accept-

ance. He may train up his children to respect the rules of society, but to teach them to observe the ordinances of Heaven is not, in his view, essential to their welfare. Yet the very first sin, after man's fall, was a disregard of sacred matters! This was followed by envy and anger, by murmurings against God, and by malice, which fast ripened into hate, and terminated in a brother's bloody death. So may the ruinous course of many a young man be traced to a neglect of ordinances, which he had been taught to respect, or to a violation of the Sabbath, which he had been brought up to observe. Philosophy may trace crime to unbridled passions; but the Bible teaches us that all evils flow from sin. Man's heart cannot be right toward his neighbor, unless right toward God. He who withholds from God his dues, may at any time deprive his neighbor of his rights. He who reverences God, will respect God's image in man. He who looks up to God with a grateful, lowly heart, is free from "envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness." Loving God, he loves his neighbor as himself.

Sinful men, however, are apt to be unreasonable in relation to the claims of God. Not only must they be permitted to serve God in their own way, but they expect to be accepted—no matter whether their offering has been merely the homage of the lips, a conscience-quieting compliance with some religious custom, or some beggarly charity as an atonement for a life habitually careless and undevout; as though God had not a right to prescribe the way in which he is to be worshipped—a valid claim on all that we have and are; or could be

pleased with a heartless, faithless sacrifice ! Of all who presume on the Divine acceptance, they are the most deceived, who, overlooking the manner in which God has required us to worship him, or the only grounds on which, in consistency with his high perfections, he can justify the sinner — make a merit of their formal observances, and ostentatious almsgiving, or barren virtues : and the reason may be found in the fact that, just in proportion as men make a merit before God of any thing they do, are they blind to the spirituality of his law, and to their own guilt and ill deserts ; while any attempt to shake their vain confidence, often leads them to fortify their ground by the additional consideration, that God can be neither just nor good, if they are not to be accepted. Here is the origin of hard thoughts of God, and of all repugnance to the principles of his holy word : man's desire to be accepted without being obliged to renounce the preconceptions of his darkened mind, and the prepossessions of his depraved heart. That is the darling religion for fallen men, which will serve to quiet them in their formality and worldliness. Thus it is that corrupt systems of religious faith so often displace the religion of the Bible, and that the Bible itself, in some instances, comes to be rejected : thus, also, that men often go on in the ways of their heart, yet hope all will be well ; and that, while knowingly neglecting God's requirements, they aim to exculpate themselves. This, indeed, is a sad feature of our fallen nature — to attempt to justify one's self, even when consciously in the wrong ; to be angry at those whom we have injured, rather than to reproach ourselves — like the criminal who condemns

the laws which condemn him, and the judge who pronounces his sentence, rather than condemn himself; and hence the sinner is so often led to question the rectitude of the law, rather than admit his own blameworthiness—to think that God is a hard master, and will do him wrong, should he not be finally accepted! This is more than unreasonable—it is impiety and rebellion—a determination to put off the claims of God with any thing, and yet to demand heaven as a right!

In like manner, unworthy thoughts of God are not unfrequently suggested by the difference in his providential dealings with individuals. Overrating their own merits, or rather unmindful of the fact that they are sinners, men are prone to give way to feelings of irritable dejection—virtually accusing Him who made them, of being either arbitrary in his procedures, or partial in the bestowment of his favors. So they who, by their improvidences, have precluded their own advancement in life, are apt to harbor invidious sentiments toward those whose wise forethought has, under favor of Providence, led to their success. It is not always necessary to injure our neighbor in his person or property, before we can incur his displeasure: to do what he has not done—what he will not or cannot do—is, under certain circumstances, an offence to his self-love, which he may not easily pardon. Similar feelings are sometimes expressed in relation to those whose prayerful diligence in the cause of religion has been signally owned and blessed of Heaven.

But to blame Providence, or to envy the righteous; to quarrel with those rebukes which, by our own sins

we have brought upon ourselves ; or to be indignant with those who, by abounding in the fruits of righteousness, have rendered themselves, through Jesus Christ, approved in the sight of God—is, in either respect, the sign of a bad heart—it is the disposition of Cain—and oftener betrayed by the lowering look, than we may be forward to suspect or willing to admit. “The foolishness of man perverteth his way :” still worse—after perverting his own way, then “his heart fretteth against the Lord !” Though his own ways are not equal and right, yet, to shield himself from self-condemnation, and justify himself in his envy and spleen, he says in his heart that “God’s ways are not equal.” Cain-like in his feelings, he will neither do well himself, nor allow others to do well ; neither “go into the kingdom himself, nor suffer them that are entering to go in !” Even the work of “casting out devils” must be done according to his manner of “sacrificing,” or it is not well done. To anticipate him in works of love and mercy, is to be exposed to his indignant rebuke. Such is the disposition of the carnal heart, unhappily oftener betrayed in religious matters than in secular affairs.

But, however men, through the force of their pride and selfishness, may discern in the ways of Providence what they regard as just cause for dissatisfaction and complaint, God has a perfect right to do what he will with his own, and to bestow his favors on whom he pleases. To withhold from him this right, is to deny his sovereignty over his creatures, and, that by reason of sin, we have forfeited all claim on his goodness. Still, though God is under no obligation to make all

his creatures equal in respect to their natural gifts and advantages in life, yet “is he no respecter of persons :” no one is favored by him more than another, on account of something personal. Hating nothing that he has made, the souls of his creatures are equally dear to him ; and whatever provision has been made for the salvation of one, is made for all. “He has fashioned all their hearts alike”—is not willing that any should perish—denies his favor to none unless they have forfeited it by their own acts, and becomes the enemy only of those who “hate him without a cause.” In relation to Cain, God, so far from having been actuated by any personal antipathy or prejudice, acted according to the established law of his kingdom. He could not have had respect to Cain and his offering, without relinquishing his claim to the heartfelt homage of his intelligent creation, hoodwinking vice and hypocrisy, sanctioning unbelief in the promised seed, and doing fatal injustice to Abel and his offering. To have made no difference between their respective offerings, and expressed his approbation of both alike, would have been to encourage the one in his wickedness and infidelity, and discourage the other in his righteousness and faith. To suppose that God could have failed to discriminate between the sacrifices, is to conceive that he might confound moral distinctions, and break the sceptre of his own uncreated rule.

As Cain, then, had no just reason to be angry with God, neither has any man now. Unchangeable in his nature and perfections, God adheres to the same high principles in the administration of his moral govern-

ment. He can no more be partial than he can be false. While his laws are unchangeable, his ways cannot be unequal. He “has written unto us the great things of his law”—told us his will and our duty—set before us life and death, blessing and cursing. Each soul is held responsible for its own acts ; and in his judgment of men he will be influenced by no personal considerations, no partiality or prejudice, no respect whatever either to their rank, their riches, their business, or their power. Righteous in his judgment, he will judge men, not as they judge one another, but as they ought to be judged—according to their real moral character ; he will treat them, not with any reference to the things for which, through their pride and worldliness, they are wont to esteem one another, but as they ought to be treated—according to their moral deserts. No sinner can be saved but by the grace of God ; yet all will at last be judged according to their works ; and thus, whether men be saved or lost, there will be no ground for either boasting or complaining. It was in well-doing that Abel obtained eternal life : his life and works bore witness to his faith, and the righteousness of him in whom he believed, was the ground for his justification before God. Hence the Divine announcement to Cain : “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted ? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door”—unforgiven sin—ever-besetting sin—changeless, indestructible sin—which will follow hard after thee whithersoever thou goest—go down with thee through the gates of death, and rise with thee, and appear as a swift witness against thee in judgment ! Such is the great principle

of God's government: "He will render to every man according to his deeds." If any then be lost, whose will be the fault? Alas! damned soul, hadst thou only *done well*, thou mightest have been a glorified saint.

Cain's jealousy of his brother was probably enhanced through fear of losing whatever privileges and rights belonged to him as the first-born; but God did not intend this, and therefore told him that his acceptance of Abel's offering did not transfer to him the birth-right. In this respect also may the Past be seen in the Present. God's acceptance of the offerings of the righteous does not alter the distinctions which his providence has made among men. The wicked may be prospered, the righteous may not succeed. God does not change his laws to obstruct the former in their wickedness, nor to favor the latter in their well-doing. The wicked may live on in prosperity, the righteous may be cut off by the hand of violence. The difference between them is in their hearts, not in their outward circumstances. It cannot be known from God's outward dealings with them whether they are righteous or wicked. Who would not suppose that so righteous a man as Abel would have been shielded from all harm? Shall the good be thus requited? Shall it be told in all coming generations that God suffered Abel to be cruelly slaughtered? and that Cain—the murderer!—was permitted to live? The first death—that of a righteous man! The first slain—a righteous man! Who shall describe the emotions of his parents as they hung over his bloody corse? What must have been their consternation, their anguish and despair, when they beheld

death for the first time, and then in the livid, mutilated features of their beloved son!—

“Alas! both for the deed, and for the cause!
But have I now seen death? Is this the way
I must return to native dust? Oh, sight
Of terror, foul and ugly to behold!
Horrid to think, how horrible to feel!”

We know what a sore evil death is to the father, when it strikes down before him the hope and joy of his heart; but we cannot enter into the feelings of Adam, unless we could with him recall the bliss of Eden, and realize the consequences of his sin, not merely in his banishment from those peaceful scenes, but in the entrance of crime and death into the relations of his family. His sons?—the one murdered! the other—his first-born—the murderer! Sad effects of his apostasy! enough to have brought his own sin back to his remembrance with whelming force. And who shall say that it was not so ordered, that Adam might have a deeper sense of the evils of his sin, and feel that there was no peace for him but in the hope of the promise, and final deliverance from the power of the grave?

The memory of that bloody act cannot be obliterated. It is the first death, and the death of one who had led an upright life—whose sacrifice to God had just been accepted! What a triumph for the Wicked One! what an insidious weapon does it furnish for him to wield in assailing virtue, and in encouraging vice and crime! How disastrous its effects in all future times! Shall we say it is no wonder wickedness increased as men multiplied? that men grew bold in iniquity until God repented that he had made man? No; let us not

so wrong God, or be so unmindful of our high relations. Cain lived on; but who that reflects for a moment, would not rather have been in the place of his murdered brother? Cain lived only to work out his own punishment. God put a mark on him, that all men might know and shun the fratricide, and that the remembrance of his bloody deed might serve as a warning in all coming times. Men need warnings against irreligion and crime, as well as incentives to faith and piety. We are not told when or how Cain died. He had been guilty of a woful sin—doubly aggravated by his disregard of Heaven's own expostulations. He had lied in the very presence of God, to conceal his crime, and insultingly replied to God's inquiry; in killing his brother, he had virtually aimed a ruthless blow at God himself! and it is enough for us to know that his life was a hell on earth—the prelude of a deeper, darker hell beyond the grave.

So much for having given way to evil passions—for *not* having done as he ought to have done before remorse precluded godly sorrow, and the stern demands of justice silenced the voice of mercy. Ye who neither fear God nor regard man; ye who say in your hearts, "What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" and act on the presumption that religion is vain; ye who are beginning to "eat of the fruit of your own ways"—say, what means that mark on Cain's forehead? whence and how came it there—so deeply engraven that it can never be effaced?

There can be no security against the most awful violation of God's commandments, but in timely repen-

tance. The way of sin is downward by accelerated steps; and no one can say, when he begins to do wrong, where he will stop! Hence sin brings with it its own punishment. The longer one goes on to sin, the greater obstacles will he encounter, the more bitter will be his disappointments, and the deeper his conviction that God has a controversy with him, until he is at last forced, as it were, to reiterate the exclamation, "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

There is no peace to the wicked. Whatever their creed or their devices, they cannot alter the constitution of things; cannot be happy while living in the neglect of known duty; cannot find peace and safety in departing from God, and violating the laws of their moral being. At some period of their history, their sin will find them out—be charged home on them—show itself in their woe-worn visage, their anguished spirit, their fearful expectation of coming wrath: if not here, hereafter it *shall* find them out, and then "bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder."

The record does not authorize us to affix to Cain's punishment the idea of eternal. The future life was not at so early a period clearly revealed, and every thing then was concealed under the veil of temporary good and evil; nor is it to be inferred from the fact that Cain's life was spared, that blood does not demand blood. "Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed," was the subsequent ordinance of Heaven; but, at the period to which we refer, Cain could not have died by the hand of man, unless it had been either by an act of private revenge, or by the hand

of his own father. For this reason, in compassion to his father, God might have spared Cain's life. But neither the fact that God did not strike him dead, nor even intimate to him, so far as we know, that awful eternity which he had prepared for himself, can lessen our impression of God's wrath and curse on his devoted head. It appears to me that no one can duly ponder the record of Cain's punishment, without the conviction that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." What a doom! what a spectacle of unutterable misery! Deprived of God's favor and blessing—cut off from all means of hope—cursed from the earth, with no place to rest his head, or in which to hide his guilty face—abandoned of God, and an outcast from men! his life in perpetual danger, and he a terror to himself! Be it so, that the mark was primarily designed that no man should lay violent hands on him; yet it was also that all men might take warning from his forlorn condition: and with the full blaze of Revelation streaming upon our page, what does such a spectacle of impenitent misery image to our mind but the condition of the lost soul, "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power?"

Here, also, we can hardly fail to perceive how impertinent are all those speculative inquiries with which men so often embarrass their own minds, and obstruct the force of truth. Though God foresaw the issue of Cain's anger, and did not interfere to prevent his crime, except so far as to remonstrate with him, and warn him against the consequences of impenitence and unbelief, yet is

Cain held to be guilty, and punished with unrelenting severity. But if these events were brought about in accordance with the Divine purposes, how could Cain be regarded as culpable? If God could have easily prevented that tragic deed, does it not reflect on his holiness and goodness that he did not? How much better for the brothers had they been upheld in virtuous devotion to the will of God! Yes; and how much better for Adam and his posterity had he only been restrained from eating the forbidden fruit! But shall we implicate our Maker in the sins of his creatures, because they might not have sinned had they not been left to themselves? As well say that all darkness is from the sun, because it is always dark when the sun is gone! Or shall we affirm that, as the fall was in accordance with the Divine purposes, man could not have been to blame? With as much truth may we say, that a Being of infinite skill and knowledge could not have so formed man, that in all the circumstances in which he might be placed he should possess and exercise moral agency! If man could have been constituted a moral agent, there is nothing unreasonable in supposing, nor any thing incompatible with his personal responsibility in admitting, that his Creator might have determined that, in the perfect exercise of his moral powers, he should act in such a manner, and form such a character. Certain it is that God made man upright: this might be made to appear on grounds independently of the data with which the record has furnished us; and had man retained his fealty to God, what a glorious world would this have been! But he did not, and hence his expulsion from

the meet abode of innocence and bliss ; his toils and trials ; his bitter disappointment in his first-born — his agony over the grave of Abel !

O mortal ! cease to be wise above what is written. Intrude not “where angels dare not tread” — thou canst not be as God. Remember thou art fallen — lost to hope, unless his grace interpose to lead thee to a Redeemer from the power of death and hell.

Be it there is mystery in the origin of evil ; there is none in the original promise that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. This serves to light up the darkness that envelops the Fall : as when the noble forest of the Pyrenees fell before the consuming blast, a pure stream of silver gushed from earth’s bosom, and revealed for the first time those mines afterward so celebrated and so enriching to the nations ; so, amid the ruins of the Fall, may we catch a glimpse of that wondrous plan since developed, and now gathering together the elect of God from the ends of the earth.

Let it be admitted, too, that the course of God’s providence toward the righteous often seems mysterious ; yet may the death of Abel serve to guide us amid the perplexities, and succor us amid the trials, and cheer us amid the sorrows of this world of sin and misery. That event was ordered in infinite wisdom and love ! By that event God designed to teach us certain great lessons : that this world is not the final home of the righteous ; that the time and manner of one’s death are of little account, so long as he is prepared to die ; that it is greatly better to suffer wrong at the hands of a brother, than to do wrong ; that the righteous must not look for their

reward on earth ; that faith is the great criterion of man's religious character, not his exemption from the ills of life ; that, though the wicked may outlive the good, it is owing to the infinite forbearance of a holy God ; that a wicked man is more to be pitied in his long life, than the righteous in his speedy death ; that it is infinitely better to die with the mark of the Lamb on our forehead, than to live with the mark of Cain.

We are wont to speak of the power of Christian faith ; how it can exorcise self from the human bosom, and render a man dead to the world with its affections and lusts, and imbue his mind with sentiments of the noblest charity and most sublime devotion. We go back in thought to those times in the history of God's people, when Zechariah's blood was poured out in the court of the house of the Lord ; when Stephen yielded up his spirit amid the missiles and execrations of an infuriated rabble ; or when such men as Huss and Cranmer sealed their testimony in the fires of the stake : this same faith animated righteous Abel, and he was first of that noble army of martyrs ! The first, too, to enter heaven — thither to be followed by all holy men in each succeeding generation of the church of God ; the first fruits of that victory achieved by him who “ through death destroyed him that had the power of death.”

How does it serve to divest death of its terrors, when we reflect that he who first tasted death was a righteous man ; and that death to him was but “ a subterranean avenue to bliss !” How does it serve to animate our faith in him who offered up his life on Calvary's cross — when we consider that it was by faith in him, Abel

offered up a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain ; and that, though the first to die, he was also the first saved from the power of death through faith in him whose blood now “ speaketh better things ” than even the blood of righteous Abel — telling us that he who should come, has come ; that he who was the hope of the promise, is now formed in the soul of every believer, “ the hope of glory.”

We plume ourselves on the lights of civilization and philosophy, and hail every discovery in science and new phase of political economy and religious belief, as so many new and more potent means of elevating man’s views, and improving his condition. The Past with its teachings is despised, because man was then only in the infancy of his race, and this mighty mind within us had not begun to be conscious of its giant powers. But what was the history of the Hebrew nation but the gradual unfolding of that idea which was embodied in Abel’s sacrifice ? What is the Christian dispensation, which has given birth to such wondrous changes and noble achievements, but the fuller development of that same idea ? To what do we owe all that ennobles existence and gladdens life, and succors want, and sympathizes with sorrow, and irradiates the darkness of the grave, but to the hope of that promise which was embodied in Abel’s sacrifice ? Christianity were wanting in its first and most essential evidence, if it could not be traced back even to man’s fall. No religion can be a suitable religion for us which was not essentially the religion of the first man’s family. I want no such religion if I am not a sinner against God ; and if I am, then I must have the

religion which was provided for the first sinner on earth. If the first man that died was saved by faith in Christ, then his was a heaven-born religion, and that religion will save me. If the first born son into the world was not accepted in his sacrifice, because he rejected the promise and presumed on his own merits, then there is no salvation for any one of Adam's race who rejects the faith in Christ.

Adam's family, indeed, presents in miniature a picture of our race; their labors and sorrows, hopes and fears, loves and hate, goodness and wickedness, faith and unbelief. As they sighed when the thought of Paradise recurred to their minds, so does man now sigh for a peace which the world cannot give. There is now in every family the same susceptibilities, and the same toils and trials. The evil now bring their own offerings, such as their pride suggests, or their worldly interests dictate; the good now come before God in reliance, not on themselves, but on him whom Abel's sacrifice prefigured; the good still suffer from the evil, and the evil wrong their neighbor, and make haste to shed innocent blood; the good still enjoy the gratulations of conscience, and the evil writhe under the premonitory afflictions of coming wrath.

Abels still die; and Cains still live! But Abel's religion lives! yes; and, blessed be God! lights many an altar, and is transforming many a soul into the re-created image of its God! So, too, does Cain's religion survive. Reluctant as some may be to admit, painful as it is to reflect on this fact, it cannot be denied. Cain's unbelief, Cain's selfishness, Cain's diabolical malevo-

lence, still live ! ever causing lamentation and woe — scattering “firebrands, arrows, and death !”

They who are absorbed in their own schemes, and respect not the rights and interests of others ; they who serve God in a way that he has not appointed, or reject the sacrifice which he has provided for lost sinners ; they who envy and hate the righteous, and violate any of Heaven’s statutes to gratify unhallowed passions and compass selfish ends ;—are, *at heart*, even as Cain was, though, in the infatuation of their self-love, they are blinded to their real moral character.

In fact, there is but one scriptural division of the human family—the Cains and the Abels ; the wicked and the righteous ; the rejectors and the followers of the Lamb ! This division is most serious. It denotes a radical difference in men, though they are all “by nature children of wrath”—a difference in the character of their affections, in the nature of their faith, and in the foundation of their hopes—a difference which will fit them for totally different conditions and employments in the world to come ; and which, as in the case of the brothers, betokens a final separation—wide as the gulf between heaven and hell !

Men may deny this division ; but they cannot obstruct this approaching separation. Sin lies at the door of every man who has not done what he ought to have done—ready to come upon him, and overpower him, and hand him over to the judgment !

THE PATRIARCH'S DEATH-BED.

HAVING heard that Jacob was sick unto death Joseph, taking with him his two sons, hastens to his father's bed-side. Years of absence, with all the corrupting influences of prosperity, had not impaired the filial regard of the one, nor had the paralyzing weight of years deadened in the bosom of the other his paternal affections. 'Let him live,' is the language of Joseph's heart; 'O God of my fathers! let him live until I can reach him. Let me and mine receive his parting benediction. If his days be numbered, let me at least have the melancholy satisfaction of closing his eyes in death!'

He arrives in time, and meets with a cordial reception from his sick and dying parent. And "Who are these?" inquired the old man. "They are my sons," answered Joseph, "whom God hath given me in this place."—"And Israel said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them:" God's goodness has not only prevented my fears, but exceeded my hopes. He has been indeed gracious to me: "Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face; and, lo, God hath showed me also thy seed."—"And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac

did walk ; the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads ; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac ; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth. And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh.”*

This scene represents the Patriarch to us in an engaging light—his irrepressible emotions of joy on beholding Joseph and his sons, his tender solicitude for their spiritual welfare, his grateful sense of past mercies, his serene confidence in the Divine promises, and his tranquillity in view of his approaching dissolution.

Surely, He whom the patriarch devoutly acknowledged as his God, was not an ideal, much less a material being. To his eye God must have had a distinctly personal and spiritual existence. He was the God before whom his fathers had walked, and whom he would have his own children obediently and reverently follow—the God who had sustained and guided and guarded him all his life long, and to whose providence and grace he would commit their interests for time and eternity.

How remarkable that at so early a period of the world—long before the era of speculative thought—that old man should have had such a clear and definite conception of the only living and true God ; such an intelligent belief in his providence, and so firm and cordial a reliance on his faithfulness ! And how does it tend to confirm us in the truth of our own theistical senti-

* Gen. xlviii. 15, 16, 20.

ments, when we reflect that He whom *we* call God, is the same gracious Being whom all holy men of old worshipped ; that He who fed Jacob, has by the same providence ministered to our wants, and that the “Angel which redeemed Jacob from all evil,” is the same angel of the covenant who, in the fulness of time, came into our world to redeem us to God !

It is this scene to which Paul referred when he said : “By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph ; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”* Hence, it might be observed, that in our approaches to God, it behooves us to draw nigh unto him with reverence and godly fear. He is great and “greatly to be feared.” Girt with majesty and strength, his holiness is as pure as the inaccessible light he inhabits. Dwelling in the effulgence of his own uncreated purity, before him the angels veil their faces, and bow in profoundest adoration. Who can think of that Being who comprehends in himself all that is great and pure and excellent ; who sits enthroned in all space, and through all eternity — at whose fiat the regions of immensity were filled with suns and stars and systems ; on whose arm the universe hangs, and in whose hand are the lots of all beings — and not be well nigh overwhelmed with feelings of awe !

The Patriarchs were characterized by the reverential feelings they cherished toward God ; and thus Jacob, aged as he was, and drawing nigh unto death, rose upon his knees to worship, though he was obliged to lean on the top of his staff. What a spectacle of godliness ! and

* Heb. xi. 21.

what a reproof to those who, though God has blessed them with health, do never assume the attitude of devotion even during the solemnities of the sanctuary. How little reverence is oftentimes visible even in the house of God ! and why is it, but that there is often no sense of God's presence, no feeling of our sinfulness and wants, no heart for devotional duties. Every thing in God's service should be expressive of godly fear ; and if we do not reverence Him in the day of health, shall we be able to worship him in the hour of mortal sickness ?

But the patriarch's death-bed scene gives rise to reflections which require more particular note.

The blessing of a dying Christian parent is more to be coveted than the legacy of the richest worldling. The latter, like the poisoned arrows bequeathed by Hercules to Philoctetes, may become the means of the inheritor's destruction. Often does the inheritance of riches which a godless father spent his life in accumulating, result in wretchedness and ruin to the son. With such a bequest, and from such a source, come temptations to self-indulgence, without the counteracting principle of personal responsibility to God. But the blessing of a dying Christian parent, though he may have no worldly goods to leave behind him, "maketh rich, and hath no sorrow added."

It is the inheritance of a *good name* which, next to personal worth, is more to be prized than all "the wealth of Ormus and of Ind." Memento of a parent's virtues, it will be dearer to the heart—should right views be taken of life—than any inherited titles could have been. With the treasured blessing, which is, as it were, the

seal of a parent's faith in God, he need not envy those who pride themselves on ancestral renown. He can ever say to himself, though excluded by his birth from the circles of worldly rank : 'My father was a *Christian*, which is "the highest style of man." He did not walk with the great on earth, but with the greater in heaven—with the greatest and best of beings. He was not surrounded in his dying moments by the rich and the noble of this world, but angels ministered at his couch ; and he now stands clad with undecaying honor before the throne of God and the Lamb.'

It is moreover the inheritance of wisdom. We may have gathered the sayings of the ancients, or pondered the precepts of the Bible ; but no words have such influence over the heart as the last words of a dying Christian parent. They may have been heard before, but the circumstances in which they are now uttered, invest them with fresh interest, and give to them spirit and life.

To see a father stretched upon the bed of death ; to know that the eye which had so long beamed on us with affection, will soon be closed ; that he who had provided for our wants, counselled us, borne with our waywardness and follies, been our best friend from earliest childhood, must in a few brief hours be consigned—a pale and stiffened corpse—to the dark grave, with what emotion do we watch his changing looks ! with what solicitous intentness do we bend over him to catch his dying words ! Do his lips move ? does he counsel his children ? does he bless them ? Those feeble accents are not unheard, nor will they be unheeded. They have

sunken deep into hearts which the warmth of a parent's dying love had melted. Deepening our natural attachment to the memory of a parent, they have made an impression which cannot be erased.

Perhaps the youth who had grieved his parent's heart by his dissipation and vices, is moved by this last scene to give his own heart to God; for he who disregards the living parent, may heed the dying one: or perhaps, after the interval of natural grief, he revisits his former haunts; but the night watches are full of remorse and bitterness to his spirit. The obtruded remembrance of a parent's dying words reproach him. To his excited imagination, that face which death had shrouded, seems to be now looking down upon him with a mingled expression of love and sorrow. 'Tis more than he can bear: 'Forgive me, sainted spirit,' he exclaims, 'forgive me, O my God!'

Often have the last words of a dying Christian parent come over the mind, to arrest the thoughtless, guide the wandering, or cheer the disconsolate.

But the blessing of a dying parent is virtually equivalent to the blessing of Heaven. It was in the case of Jacob, and there is no scriptural reason it should not be so now. Prayer is the medium of blessings, whether to us or ours; and if ever the Christian be in a suitable frame to pray aright, it is when he draws nigh to the gates of death. There is a serenity, too, in the closing scene of a good man's life, which tells us that with him all is peace, and we would imbibe his spirit—a something so allied to God and heaven, that the dying blessing has always been highly valued. On the other hand,

the curse of a dying man has, in every age, been regarded with peculiar horror,—the common impression having been that it could not be without a supernatural influence in shaping one's future destiny. Unenlightened people have shrunk back aghast from the curse of a dying man, as from the malediction of the Great Spirit himself! But though there may be no foundation in nature for this impression, yet we cannot doubt that the blessing of a righteous man is instigated by the Father of mercies, and that it will be secured by his covenant faithfulness. The blessing of Jacob was in effect the blessing of the God of Jacob; and the prayers of Christian parents have often been answered in the conversion of their children; and their parting blessings on their children been realized by them in the enjoyment of God's unerring guidance and eternal favor!

Parents, then, should so live that they may die as Jacob died. Next to the concern of a parent for the salvation of a dying child, must be that of a religious son or daughter for the salvation of a dying parent. To see a father or a mother living without the cordial recognition of God's authority—still bent on the world's vanities, and thoughtless of eternity, is painful enough, even to children who are not themselves decidedly serious; but to see a parent dying in his sins, must be anguish in the extreme, to a pious child. How shall I endure the destruction of my kindred? how bear the thought, that the ties which bound me to my parent are sundered forever?—that, though we shall meet in the other world, we may then meet to part forever!

But when a parent dies in the faith, how different are

our emotions ! How did he soothe our sorrow and allay our fears ! How is the pang of separation alleviated by the thought that we shall yet meet around our Father's throne in heaven ! Though our parents may have been long dead, how often does their dying hour steal over our remembrance, and speak to us of their heavenly home !

Perhaps our hearts are never so full of soothing hope—so fraught with a tender and pensive satisfaction, as when we stand by the grave of a parent who, while dying, commended us to God in prayer ! The world may have frowned upon us—our mind may be heated by the toils and conflicts of life ; but here, a holy calm comes over our hearts—here repose the ashes of my *Mother*, and her sainted spirit is looking down upon me from the heights of glory !

But if parents would die in peace, they must put their trust in the God of Jacob. 'How can I leave my children ?' is the natural expression of a dying parent's affections. 'Who will care for them as I do ? guide them into the way they should go ? point out to them the dangers of their path—provide for their wants, and sympathize with their sorrows ? They are young and inexperienced : what will be their character ? what their condition ? And how have they entwined themselves around my heart ! I can give up any thing else, but I cannot bear to part with my children.' No ; you cannot part with them without anguish of spirit, unless you have given your supreme affections to God ; unless you are his, and he is yours, by virtue of his gracious covenant ; and you can draw nigh unto Him who "never

said to the seed of Jacob, Seek ye my face in vain," but promises to be the "Father of the fatherless." Hence, the dying Christian is enabled to commit his children into the hands of his covenant-keeping God. Dear as they are to him, Jesus is dearer still; faithful as he may have been to his charge, God will be more faithful to his promise. Yes; he can bear to part with his loved ones; he can humbly give them up, and all that appertains to the world; for he *believes in God*, and knows that God "will never leave them nor forsake them;" that there is no love so pure and strong as his — no care so watchful as his — no security for their true interests so great as his covenant faithfulness. "The God which fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all evil, *bless* the lads."

I am aware that such views are apt to provoke the skepticism of men intent on the world. Even Christian professors may be sometimes detected in making "provision for the flesh" — securing worldly friends, and hoarding their treasures, for their children. But I would not, for all that the world can promise, or mammon bequeath, be in the condition of that parent who, as he thinks of the time when his children are to be left by him in such a world as this, has no God to whom he can go and refer their interests; who, amid the dark perplexity of his thought, can find no relief, save in the atheistic sentiment: 'Well, they must take their chance!' Such a one is to be pitied; but still more those children who, in consequence of their parents' godless example, are one day to go forth amid the temptations and trials of the world, with no guide but passion, no guard but self!

We have adverted to the trial of parting with one's children : it is, in some instances, an equal if not a greater trial for the Christian to leave the vineyard in which he has been so long laboring for God. But this same faith in the Divine promises enables him, at last, calmly and cheerfully to refer the interests of Zion to God's covenant faithfulness. 'I have been but an humble instrument in his hand. He can raise up another such. Whatever especial need there may now seem to be for my labors, it matters not : though I die, yet God lives ; and he can carry on his cause without me as well as with me.' — "I am leaving the ship of the church in a storm," said the dying Owen, "but while the Great Pilot is in it, the loss of a poor under-rower will be inconsiderable." What a satisfaction it must have been to Jacob to reflect, that, though he was going from his children, God would be with them, and bring them into the land of their fathers, notwithstanding all the obstacles and enemies that might oppose their entrance ! His was, indeed, a strong faith ; but not stronger than the promises of God warranted, or than every Christian is now encouraged and authorized to cherish.

It is pleasing to note the evidences of piety in youth — to see them renouncing the vanities of earth, and consecrating themselves to God — wrestling for the mastery over the lusts of the flesh, and aspiring after immortality. But to the thoughtful mind, aged piety presents a more satisfying spectacle. The youth who to-day seems so devoted, may relapse on the morrow — the early promise of usefulness be choked by the pleasures or the cares of the world — the dawning light set in darkness !

There is much in his own heart, and every thing in the world around him, to shake the faith of the youthful Christian, and at last swerve him from the path of duty. But here is one who has adhered to his principles without compromising their strictness, and passed unscathed through the fires of earth's temptations ; who, while others may have been deterred by dangers, discouraged by difficulties, or turned aside to lying vanities, has kept on his way ; whose eye still looks, but with a steadier gaze, on things above ; whose soul still pants, but with deeper longings, after union with God ; and whose faith grasps, with a stronger hand, those "great and precious promises" which are "yea, and amen in Christ Jesus."

Religion, in such a case, is proved to be, not the impulse of youth, but the conviction of age ; not the offspring of ignorance and fear ; not the fantasy of an ardent temperament, nor the sentiment of a morbid imagination ; but the firm belief of hoary wisdom. Hence, its greater influence, when seen to be associated with the sobriety and experience of years ; and a lifetime's cares and trials, bear witness to its value and importance. Hence, our deep respect for the man whose long life has attested the rectitude of his motives, the consistency of his actions, and the integrity of his faith ; hence it is, also, that we love to hang on the lips of an aged minister of the gospel who has borne himself worthily during the burden and heat of his day. What encouragement for Joseph to persevere in the faith, must his father's death-bed have afforded !—to hear the old man then witnessing for God, that he had found him gracious ; and to see him still trusting in the God of Abraham and of

Isaac ! There can be no stronger recommendation of religion than the fact that God was the God of our fathers, and that they found both their duty and interest in walking before him. "Speak reproachfully of Christ," said the enemies of Polycarp, as they led him to the stake, "and we will release you."—"Speak reproachfully of Christ? Eighty-six years have I served him," replied that holy man of God, "during all which time he never did me an injury : how, then, can I blaspheme him who is my King and my Saviour?"

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." They who have gone back to the world have but pierced themselves with many sorrows. Night after night do they reproach themselves for their backslidings, and often purpose to return ; but ah ! they may not—perhaps cannot ! But every day's perseverance has given to the steadfast followers of Christ a renewed conviction of the truth and worth of the gospel. Often have they additional reasons for blessing the God of their salvation ; and as they glorify God through all the days of their life, so will they glorify him by a holy death.

Jacob, we are told, was trained up in the nurture and admonition of "the fear of his father Isaac;" and now that he is old and gray-headed—his eye dim, and his strength gone ; now that he is lingering on the borders of the eternal world, what would be his condition had he not been brought to an early acquaintance with the

God of his fathers? It was the influence of early piety, deepening with his years, that shed such radiance over the evening of his life. It was the long and varied experience of God's faithfulness that rendered him so calm in view of his dissolution, and enabled him, with implicit confidence in God, to bless both Joseph and his sons.

'Now cast your eye on the aged,' might a thoughtful observer of life say to his young friend; 'mark those hoary locks, those tottering limbs, that faltering speech. All those sources of pleasure that are open to you, are closed to him; those incitements to action that thrill your bosom, are powerless to him. He is dead to all the gratifications you seek, and all the objects you pursue. Can you realize, that, should life be spared, you will become as that old man?'

"Thou must outlive
 Thy youth, thy strength, thy beauty which will change
 To withered, weak, and gray; thy senses then
 Obtuse; all taste of pleasure must forego
 To what thou hast; and for the air of youth
 Hopeful and cheerful, in thy blood will reign
 A melancholy damp of cold and dry
 To weigh thy spirits down, and last consume
 The balm of life."

'You cannot realize that you are ever to undergo so great a physical change, nor be readily persuaded that you are one day to become so indifferent to the things on which your heart is now placed; much less be induced to prepare for that greater change than even old age effects. But if you have any regard for your highest good, you will listen to the counsels of the heavenly oracle:—

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
 While the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh.

When thou shalt say, 'I have no pleasure in them ;'
While the sun, or the light,
Or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened,
Nor the clouds return after the rain :
In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble,
And the strong men shall bow themselves,
And the grinders cease because they are few,
And those that look out of the windows be darkened.
And the doors shall be shut in the streets,
When the sound of the grinding is low,
And he shall rise up at the voice of the bird,
And all the daughters of music shall be brought low ;
Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high,
And fears shall be in the way,
And the almond-tree shall flourish,
And the grasshopper shall be a burden,
And desire shall fail ; because man goeth to his long home,
And the mourners go about the streets :
Or ever the silver cord be loosed,
Or the golden bowl be broken,
Or the pitcher be broken at the fountain,
Or the wheel broken at the cistern.
Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit shall return to God who gave it."

What a change must that be ! How important to avail one's self of the lights, and succors, and consolations of the Word of God—so that, as we advance on our pilgrimage, "his statutes may be our songs ;" and that, when we put off this earthly tabernacle, we may "rejoice in the hope of the glory of God," and leave behind us the memory of the righteous !

Profane history records not unfrequent instances of kings and heroes calling their sons and servants around them, and delivering to them their last charge ; but we must go to the sacred oracles to hear of men who died worshipping God and blessing others. Who expects that an unbeliever will die as Jacob died ? Was it ever told of a dying infidel, that he called his children around him that with his last breath he might bless them in the

name of God? I have never heard of but one of this class who showed any concern for the religious welfare of his child. When the daughter of a believing mother was told that her father (who had been an infidel, and opposed to her studying the Bible) could not recover from his sickness, she threw her arms around him and solicitously asked—"When you are gone, shall I hold to your views, or follow my mother's creed?" His breast heaved—the tear started—and with a quivering lip, though with convulsive energy, he exclaimed, "*Not mine, not mine—your mother's!*"

But such an instance tends only to confirm our position. How is it possible that an infidel should die with praises and blessings on his lips? In whom does he believe? on whose promises does he rely? to whom does he pray, if he presumes to pray at all? When doubts are gathering round him like portentous clouds; and Conscience is awaking in her supremacy; and the tremendous suspicion steals over his soul that, after all, Christianity is true; when the dread thought comes home to him that the next instant he may stand before the bar of an offended God—a naked, guilty, helpless spirit! must he not be too much absorbed in his own condition to think of others? Cursed himself—feeling that he is lost—already damned! must he not be in any other frame of mind than fit to praise and bless?

Perhaps unbelief has hardened his heart; or, it may be, the indomitable pride of opinion—the stubborn reluctance of depraved nature to renounce what we have lauded, and espouse what we have despised—seals his lips in desperate silence. But if his misgivings be too

poignant to be concealed, and he must give utterance to his resistless convictions of right and wrong, of truth and falsehood, which, like lightning through the midnight sky, have flashed over his dark soul, how does he express himself but in the bitterness of his remorse, or in the groans of his despair! How does he curse himself for the sentiments he had taught, for the example he had set to his household, and curse those, too, who seduced him from the faith, and entrapped him in the snares of the pit! Perhaps—he *curses God, and dies!*

This is no picture of our imagination: I might refer to the recorded curses and blasphemies which have escaped the lips of dying infidels,—could we not readily conceive that such must be the feelings of a man who, when hanging over the grave, awakes to the conviction that he had believed a lie—lived only to work out his own damnation!

Not so may a Christian die. Convinced, by his lifelong experience, of the Divine goodness, and having the most implicit confidence in the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, no dark thoughts can brood over his mind—no malign feelings rise in his heart. Full of praise and gratitude, he would be the medium of diffusing that peace which he himself enjoys. Blest himself, his prayer is that God would bless others. Knowing now, from his own consciousness, that

“Jesus can make a dying bed
Feel soft as downy pillows are,”

how solicitous is he that all should embrace the Saviour whom he has found! Knowing, too, how closely the

ties of nature bind us to him, he would even *prepare our minds* for his own approaching end.

Tell me not of the free thoughts and blithesome emotions of infidelity—who but the dying Christian can say any thing to strengthen the hearts and wipe away the tears from the flowing eyes of surviving relatives? From the nature of his creed, we expect that he will bless us with his parting breath, and beckon us on to the heaven whither he is going: and hence, when we know that a *Christian* is called to die, our only apprehension is, lest some turn in his disease, before death ensue, preclude the expression of his views and feelings.

What an argument, this, for Christianity! Let infidelity rest in its objections: that is the religion for me which will best sustain me, when my head is bowed on the bed of death—fill my heart with praise and my lips with blessings, when family and friends come around my couch to receive my last adieu!

What Christians most need is, not more evidence of the truth of Christianity, but more of its benign and heavenly spirit. God grant, that, when we come to die, we may be enabled to say, not that we believe, but, “*I know* whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against the last day;” and that “there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

“I die,” said the Patriarch, “but God shall be with you, and bring you into the land of promise.” His presence will more than make amends for my absence.

He will be with you through life, in the hour of death, and bring you at last to the heavenly Canaan, whither I am going. So it was : long since did Joseph sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. And thus will it be with the descendants of pious parents if they follow in the steps of their fathers, and “hold fast the beginning of their confidence steadfast unto the end.” Ere long we shall be reunited to them in another and better world.

How *great*, then, must be the *power of faith*, which can so impart sobriety to youth and cheerfulness to age—vigor to moral principle and perseverance in Christian duty—guidance to the living and hope to the dying ; which can so nerve the soul for its dire encounter with the last enemy—rendering it calm and steadfast during the solemnities of exchanging worlds—enabling it to part with earth without reluctance, and to look forward into eternity with the even serenity of trust ; which, at the last gasp of nature, can inspire it with sentiments of praise toward God and good-will to man !

And did the old man die ? Yes ; “the fathers, where are they ? and the prophets, do they live forever ?” All these, however, died in *faith* : and could we gather into one view “all the declarations of faith in God—all the gratulations of conscience—all the admonitions and benedictions to weeping friends”—all the beams of opening glory that have irradiated the countenances of God’s people as they have successively fallen asleep in Jesus—our hearts would respond to the sentiment, “Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his !”

THE LEGISLATOR'S FAITH.

VARIOUS instances of prospective faith in Christ, might be gathered from the records of the Patriarchal dispensation. But, as our object is to stimulate and guide inquiry, rather than by ingenious arguments to support a favorite hypothesis ; to justify present faith by detecting its elements even in the earliest times, rather than by multiplied detail and accumulated proofs to convince the skeptic, we confine our observations to the instances already adduced ; though the faith to which we allude, was not less conspicuous in the case of Abraham than of Jacob, in Isaac, and Joseph, and Noah, than in Abel. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off ; and were persuaded of them, and embraced them." But what were those promises ? what scriptural explanation of them can be given, unless they were the promises of a future Redeemer, successively given to the early patriarchs ? If so, it might be expected that the faith which such promises served to nurture, would be handed down, and that it would grow stronger and more efficient, as time rolled on toward their fulfilment in the permanent manifestation of the anthropomorphic word. If the Patriarchal, the Levitical, and the Christian dispensa-

tion are of God, it were but reasonable to suppose, that they have some common relation, and that their unity of design will be found in their relation to some one object. It is not unusual to trace this connection, by showing that the first and the second dispensation looked forward to the Christian, as to the consummating dispensation ; for the victory promised to the seed of the woman could not be said to be achieved, until, after suffering his mortal part to be bruised by the serpent, he had himself bruised the serpent's head ; nor could the promise to Abraham be said to be fulfilled, until in his seed all the nations of the earth were blessed ; nor could the gathering of the Gentiles to an extraordinary personage take place, according to Jacob's prediction, until the sceptre had departed from Judah ; while they who were placed under the tuition of the law, might have been assured, from the very circumstance of its exclusiveness, that the Levitical dispensation could not last. This connection, too, may be traced by means of those ceremonies, sacrifices, and types, which seemingly referred to Him who should come to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself. But any inferences from what we conceive to have been the nature of the earliest dispensations, may fail to satisfy the mind. All arguments, though logically framed, are of little weight, unless examples of faith can be adduced from the earliest times. We want to see the practical connection between the law and the gospel : for, unless faith is essentially the same, whether it be viewed under the former, or the latter dispensation ; unless it wrought then what it tends to effect now,—we can never have the assurance that the Chris-

tian faith is not foreign from the principles of the Mosaic creed.

If one example of faith in Christ could be found under the Levitical dispensation, it would, to say the least, impart additional significance to the import of its ceremonial institutions, reflect clearer light on the great design of the gospel, and animate the Christian's hopes. Nor need we look in vain : this prospective faith shines forth brightly—is signalized in the acts, not of some obscure Hebrew, but of no less a personage than the lawgiver and leader of the Israelites. Paul expressly states, that Moses “esteemed the reproach of *Christ* greater riches than the treasures in Egypt : for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.”* Nor is it necessary to resort to any ingenious process of reasoning, to evince the credibility of this passage on grounds independently of the fact, that the apostle wrote as he “was moved by the Holy Ghost.”

If the word became flesh, and dwelt among us, he who recorded the several manifestations of the word to Abraham and Jacob, could not have been unacquainted with the great object of Patriarchism. He who beheld the Angel Jehovah in the burning bush, received his commission from this angel, heard him speak, and saw his face ; who enjoyed his personal guidance in the fiery pillar, and was charged to reverence him, on the express ground that he bore the name of God, could not have been ignorant that the Angel Jehovah is the God of the Hebrew church. This angel is unequivocally pronounced to be the God of Abraham, of Isaac,

* Heb. xi. 26.

and of Jacob,* and therefore, was not a mere created angel. He was manifested as the God of the Hebrew patriarchs, both visibly and tangibly ; and therefore was not the invisible paternal God ; for “ no man hath seen God at any time,” or “ can see and live.” This Angel God, under the first two dispensations, sustained the office of a sensible organ of communication with God's covenant people, and therefore must be the same being whose prerogative it is under the Christian dispensation to declare the unseen Father.† In short, the Angel Jehovah was the same person as the word of God, and the word of God is the Messiah. Hence, John states, that “ in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God ;” and hence, our Lord himself said : “ Before Abraham was, *I am*,” and that “ Abraham rejoiced to see his day, and was glad ;” while he claimed unequivocally to himself the character of that Jehovah who was seen by Jacob at Bethel ; “ verily, I say unto you, hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.”

The law, indeed, was a dispensation but preparatory to the gospel ; it presupposed the necessity, and involved the doctrine, of a Mediator ; and it scenically exhibited the benefits of the gospel dispensation. To suppose, then, that Moses could have had no knowledge of Christ, is equivalent to the assertion that he had no comprehension of the events which he recorded, of the law which he reduced to writing, and of the sacrifices which he

* Gen. xxxii. 24-31 ; xlviii. 15-16.—Hosea xii. 2-5.

† John i. 18.

instituted ; or that he did not know what he said when he announced to the Israelites that they were to expect another prophet like himself—one who should also come in the peculiar character of sovereign, as well as legislator. More than all—it is to disregard the express testimony of Christ himself to Moses : “for he wrote of me.” The apostle’s declaration, therefore, is not without ample support. “By *faith* Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter ;” that is, actuated by faith in the promised descent of the Messiah from Israel.

This act, then, on the part of Moses, refers us to the early incidents of his life, to the singular contrivance which his mother adopted to shield his infancy from the effects of Pharaoh’s cruel law ; to his discovery amid the bulrushes, and his rescue from the dangers of the Nile, by Pharaoh’s daughter ; her compassion for the child ; her calling for a Hebrew nurse, who proved to be the child’s own mother, the pains she took with his education, and final adoption of him as her son. In all these circumstances there is something so remarkable, that we are not surprised to meet with much that is extraordinary in his history. Why should he have been so miraculously preserved ? Why should the daughter of an imperious king have taken such interest in a child whom she knew to belong to a hated race ? Why, at the imminent risk of incurring the wrath of her royal father, did she adopt the child ? And how happened it, that the child’s mother, who had evaded Pharaoh’s stern decree, and thereby jeopardized her own life, should, out of a multitude of weeping mothers, have been unwittingly

selected as his nurse? Such a variety of particulars, all uniting to one end, are at variance with the idea of chance ; they admit of no satisfactory explanation, short of the fact, that *God* directed the incidents of his early life, as he overruled his adoption by Pharaoh's daughter, and his courtly education, to the accomplishment of his own high purposes. His providence is as apparent in the case of Moses, as of Jesus ; and in fact there is so remarkable a parallel between them, that the former may be viewed as a type of the latter.

We are not furnished with a circumstantial account of his youth ; but of this we are distinctly informed, that he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. There was every temptation to comply with her wishes. She was childless ; her father was without a son ; the kingdom of Egypt was the greatest, if not the most ancient. It was for him, not to pay court to the people, nor to fawn on enthroned pride ; not to bathe his hands in the blood of a rival, or to bribe conflicting interests ; but simply to own the name of son to Pharaoh's daughter, and the kingdom would become his on the demise of her father. Most facile and seemingly trifling condition ! For how much less than a kingdom has many a man been induced to part with not only his name, but his principles !

Should he merely have owned that name, with what ease, too, might Moses have carried out his plans for ameliorating the condition of his kindred ; have even abolished idolatry ; and, in its stead, have established the worship of the only living and true God !

There was in his refusal the appearance of ingratitude

to his preserver and patroness ; a seeming unmindfulness, too, of God's goodness in having afforded him such an opportunity for advancing his own, and the interests of his people. There was even an exposure of himself to the royal displeasure, which might be visited, not merely on himself, but on the Hebrews, already most grievously oppressed. There was, indeed, no alternative for him but to accept the offer, and become rich, and honored, and mighty, in the earth ; or to refuse, and be cast out—an object of hatred and persecution ! or rather, to cast in his lot, without any worldly resources, among an enslaved, oppressed, and degraded people.

In a word, here all temptations united and conspired to influence his choice ; pleasure, riches, honors, and power—all that tends to attract, and charm, and bind the natural heart ; still, he resolutely refuses to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter !

Was it through ignorance of the nature of the offer made to him, that he refused ? How could it have been, when, from the education which he had received, and the associations which he had formed, he must have understood the advantages of his position, and the means which he might secure, whether for the gratification of his passions, the display of self, or the exercise of ambition ? What youth, on being conducted to maturity under the smile of such patronage, would not have had his imagination infected with all the imposing images of regal greatness ?

Nor could he have despaired of at last attaining the kingdom. Being the adopted heir, his right to the

throne could not have been disputed. Having been brought up in the court, and instructed in the wisdom of the Egyptians, it is not to be supposed that he would naturally have too low an opinion of himself to aspire, or too little confidence in himself to hope for success. Nor is there any thing in his history to warrant the supposition that he was of an enthusiastic turn of mind. If his instruction in Egyptian lore had tended to generate morbid feelings and mystical views, the circumstances in which he was placed were not favorable to enthusiasm ; nor would he have embraced a religion which his Egyptian teachers could not have recognised.

Could he then have acted from some sudden impulse of petulancy ? or, was it at a period when he was incompetent to decide with judgment, that he refused ? Neither supposition can be admitted, so long as we adhere to the record. As though it had been his design to preclude all skeptical surmises, the apostle states that this refusal was made when Moses was come to years,—that is, years of discretion ; and from Stephen we learn, that at that time he was full forty years old ; and it was at the same time, also, that he enjoyed among the Egyptians a great reputation for wisdom and valor. No one, therefore, so far as advantages of knowledge, of experience, and of standing, are concerned, could have been better fitted for forming an intelligent judgment, and coming to a deliberate decision. From his position and his years, he must have understood what he was to forego, and to what he was necessarily exposing himself by a refusal ; still he refused, though the choice lay not between the burden and cares

of a crown, and the sweets of affluent and quiet retirement ; but between honor and reproach, riches and poverty, ease and suffering ! Rather than accept the splendid offer, he chose affliction with the people of God. Now this is not natural : men have but little fondness for the society, much less sympathy with the trials of God's people. They shrink from toil, and contumely, and pain. They may submit for a season to privations, but it must be with the hope of thereby attaining the height of power, or the means of luxurious indulgence. Rather than knowingly expose himself to a life of poverty, and suffering, and reproach, what worldly-minded man would not even sacrifice his conscience ? But Moses freely, deliberately, chose just such a life, rather than wear a crown, and have the treasures of Egypt at his command !

It is not uncommon to disparage the importance of a religious education ; and it must be admitted, that some, notwithstanding the religious influence of parental teachings and example, no sooner reach maturity than they yield to the seductions of the world. Such instances, however, are comparatively rare. The greater proportion of those who are now enabled to withstand "the corruption that is in the world through lust," were brought in early life to an acquaintance with the principles of truth and duty. Early impressions may be counteracted ; but, in general, as are the impressions of the youth, such will be the convictions of the man ; and so will he decide when called upon to make his election between duty and self, God and mammon.

It was not in vain that the mother of Moses, to whom

Pharaoh's daughter had unknowingly committed his childhood, had often pointed him and commended him in prayer, to the God of her fathers. We can imagine with what fervor she thanked the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, for the rescue of her son; with what alacrity she took him to nurse; with what tenderness she watched over his infant steps; with what solicitous intentness of purpose she told him the history of her people, and the story of their wrongs; and, as he grew in years, of the dangers to which he was exposed, as well as of the advantages which he enjoyed; how, too, God had spared him, and placed him under the protection of a princess, that he might one day subserve the interests of his people—perhaps, effect their rescue! She was, indeed, nothing more than a poor slave; but she was a child of Abraham; and her faith in Abraham's God was not shaken, and her love for her kindred was only purified, not lessened, by their afflictions; and that God should have saved her son, and restored him to her arms, only rendered her the more prayerfully anxious that he might be trained up to declare the glory of her God, if not achieve the deliverance of her people. Nor was she disappointed. Her God was his God; her people, his people—even the people of Christ! to whose ancestors, the holy patriarchs, he had repeatedly appeared, and proclaimed himself the God of their fathers; who saw the afflictions of his people, and whose reproach was the reproach of himself.

Moses felt, therefore, that he could not be the accepted heir of a kingdom supported by a people so pertinaciously attached to idolatry, without either abandon-

ing or dissembling his religion. To have accepted the offer would have been to forsake his fathers' God, as well as blast his mother's hopes ; and such considerations might have primarily influenced his judgment. But, then, he was enabled to form a proper estimate of the tempting offer. He knew that the pleasures of the Egyptian court could not be enjoyed without sin ; that they were sinful pleasures — pleasures which would soon pass away, and leave only remorse and pain in the retrospect ; that the favor of Israel's God was more to him than the gems of a crown, or the honors of a sceptre ; that no suffering which might be laid on him, no reproach cast on him by a tyrannical king or an idolatrous people, was worthy of a moment's regret, so long as, with the clear vision of faith, he could look forward to the recompense of reward. His was a noble heart, knowing no fear but the fear of God ; no ambition but to serve God ; no desire but for the glory of God, and the welfare of his covenant people. It was *by faith* that, when he had reached the maturity of his mental powers, he *refused* to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter : faith in the existence, the government, the all-sufficiency, the faithfulness, the exceeding great and precious promises of Israel's God. In the light of truth and duty, affliction and reproach with the people of God, in and for the expectation of the Messiah, were incomparably preferable to the temporary enjoyment of sin ; even the toils and trials of a religious life, to the riches and honors of the world.

His refusal, therefore, bespeaks true greatness of mind. Most men pride themselves on outward distinc-

tions, and are wont to estimate each other according to the standard of worldly rank. Hence, the affectation of aristocratic habits by those who have suddenly become rich, and the expedients to which many resort to secure their introduction to high life. Such minds must needs be incapable of appreciating this act of Moses ; yet what would he have been, had he become a king? Could a crown have conferred dignity on Moses? Could the treasures of Egypt have rendered him more worthy of profound respect? What was a successor of the Pharaohs, compared to a descendant of the patriarchs? What the prerogatives of an idolatrous kingdom, compared with the resources of a gifted intellect, and the sympathies of a generous heart, and the aspirations of a spiritual nature, and the enjoyment of God's favor? Egypt had no ability to exalt and honor him whom God had endowed and owned as his chosen servant ! With powers, and purposes, and hopes, all in unison with the great end of his being, Moses might have looked down on kings, and on all the distinctions of wealth and honor for which men contend, as the toys of childhood.

It is time the world were disabused of its false impressions of greatness ; that things were viewed in their true light, and called by their right names. Pitiable spectacle ! men fawning on the rich—flattering the worldly great ; or scrambling for glittering dust and gilded baubles, that they themselves may have some claim to honor. How insignificant such, in contrast with him who, to find his dignity, must lay aside all earth-born distinctions !

“Himself too much he prizes to be proud,
And nothing thinks so great in man, as man.”

The philosopher who refused to burn incense to the self-styled son of Jupiter Ammon, proved himself a greater man than Alexander himself. So Moses, in refusing the proffer of a crown, evinced his superiority to all vulgar ideas of greatness. That son of a bondwoman could not have felt himself honored by being called the son of Pharaoh's daughter!

Kings may be looked up to by the many, with blended sentiments of admiration and envy; but the jewelled crown must be renounced, before man can effect any thing truly great. Moses had never conducted God's people to the promised land, much less left behind him, for the guidance of all coming ages, his imperishable records of God's works and ways, had he not refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Nor is it less necessary now, that he who would live and labor for useful ends, should renounce the world's high places of honor and distinction. What had either a Vanderkemp or a Martyn effected in the cause of ruined humanity, had they not refused all proffered honors, and laid their account with toil, privation, and suffering? All that the gospel ministry itself proposes, can be accomplished but at the expense of personal sacrifices. “The reproach of Christ” must be esteemed, rather than the treasures of the world; “affliction with the people of God” chosen, rather than the honors of ambition, or the enjoyments of indolent ease. Voluntary humility is indispensable alike to personal greatness, and to great achievements.

Unless there had been just and sufficient grounds for his belief in Israel's God, Moses could not have refused such an offer. Had he not seen Him who is the invisible Witness and Judge of human actions, it would not have entered into his heart to refuse. Amid the tens of thousands by whom he was surrounded, in all probability not one would have refused the offer. Perhaps, to all around him, from the favor he received, and the glittering prize which awaited his grasp, Moses was an object of envy. That he refused, must have been to all the courtiers a matter of profound astonishment—something they could not understand, and which was not to be explained on the ordinary principles of human action. His faith, therefore, must have been the full assurance or personal conviction of the reality of things not seen; his religion had a practical reality; it was a thing of life and word and deed; and if Moses thus denied himself, so may any other man—so will *he* deny himself who, amid the temptations of a world that lieth in wickedness, has respect unto the recompense of reward.

But why did he not yield to the wishes of his royal benefactress? Was he not under great obligations to her; and by conciliating her favor, might he not have been able to redress the wrongs of his people; or, at least, to procure for them certain immunities? Has not the providence of God secured to him favor in the sight of the royal household? Is it not most remarkable that he—an outcast child—should have been so protected, and educated, and fitted for a kingly station? and is there not in all this some intimation of high Heaven's

designs ? Will he not ultimately have it in his power to liberate his brethren after the flesh—perhaps to abolish the worship of demon gods, to enthrone the true God—his own, his fathers' God—in the hearts of the people ? He cannot refuse, when he has only to accept the offer, to enjoy so great an opportunity, and command such ample means for doing good. Thus reasons, thus concludes, *Expediency !* But Duty told him that he could not consent to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, without undervaluing and disparaging the true honor of being a son of Abraham, the father of the faithful ; could not be called the son of an unbelieving, idolatrous woman, without renouncing his religion, or be true to Pharaoh without being false to God ; that no prospect of happiness or of usefulness could justify him in doing what is wrong in itself ; that it was better for him to suffer than to sin, to deny himself for the sake of Christ, than to exalt himself for the sake of man ; that God would take care of his own—accomplish his sovereign purposes in his own way and time ; that he himself was responsible, not for results, but only for the discharge of known duty.

Such is the difference between the religious man, and the advocate for expediency, in the premises from which they respectively reason, and in the consequences to which their respective courses tend : the one having an eye single to the glory of God ; the other making mention of God only to cover his own selfish designs. It is a wide and important difference : yet often overlooked, especially where interest urgently clashes with the dictates of conscience ; and thus it happens that men so

often "do evil that good may come," sometimes conforming to the world, under the plea that it is necessary to their usefulness; then, for the sake of worldly gain, taking a step which will separate them from the people of God, and from the ordinances of religion; or again, violating truth and duty for the sake of securing or of retaining some lucrative post. Be it considered, however, that duty ordinarily involves self-denial; while expediency flatters self at the expense of conscience. Duty is founded in faith; expediency cloaks unbelief.

Moses's choice would have been folly in the extreme, had there been no recompense to which he could look forward with humble confidence. If there be no well-founded expectation of happiness in reserve for suffering virtue, and the grave were to entomb our virtuous hopes, with all the aspirations of this conscious, intellectual being, the epicure's maxim might well be our only principle of action. He would be the wisest man who seized every opportunity, and scrupled at no means, of gratifying the darling passions of our earth-born nature. But if we have been constituted the proper subjects of a moral government, and either eternal happiness or eternal misery awaits us, according as we now either obey or disobey God, then nothing here is too good to part with, nor too grievous to be borne, for the sake of Heaven's high reward; and he alone is the wise man who is willing to forego all worldly profits and pleasures, rather than forego a good conscience—to submit to any present ills rather than jeopard his eternal all. What are the gains of the world that they should ever tempt us even to neglect our spiritual interests? Are they

not attended with toil and trouble, and liable at any moment to be wrested from our grasp? And the pleasures of sin, are they not at best but mixed and imperfect pleasures, seldom to be enjoyed with a quiet mind? and, when attended with no drawbacks, and no evil forebodings, are they not of brief and uncertain duration? Then Moses, in choosing as he did, showed his wisdom, as well as proved his faith. But, at the present day, how many think more of gaining the world than of preserving “a conscience void of offence!” of enjoying the world than of being prepared to render up their final account “with joy and not with grief!”—thus living as if the world were every thing, and religion nothing! And can no note of warning break up this ruinous infatuation? Let no one tell me of the pressure of his secular engagements; how it is necessary for him to do this, or to gain that, on account of his comfortable support, or even his usefulness. Nothing can justify any violation of conscience or trifling with duty; much less the compromising of our religious principles. “We cannot serve God and mammon.” The choice must be made between God and the world. No man can have God for his portion who does not “renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil.” If we would secure a title to his favor, no worldly object is to be sought after, no worldly good is to be enjoyed, which cannot be so without sin. No matter how powerfully self and sin may plead with us to accept this post, to gain that treasure, or to gratify that other passion: consider, we are here but for a few years; even the morrow may find us in the other world, and *there* no earth-born distinctions

will be recognised, no sensual gratifications retained—no consciousness there but of what we are in the sight of God—no difference there save that which obtains “between him that served God and him that served him not.”

To his deep persuasion of invisible realities, his full assurance of reversionary rewards for self-denying virtue, we distinctly trace the refusal and the choice of Moses. So did Paul, and in a manner hardly less illustrious, exemplify the power of faith—following in the footsteps of those “of whom the world was not worthy.” Such has been its influence over unnumbered minds; and nothing short of this same faith can enable any one to withstand the pressing temptations of indolence or of ambition, of avarice or of sensuality.

It is said that Moses “had respect unto the recompense of the reward,” and that “he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.” How inexplicable such expressions, on the supposition he had no sufficient ground for his belief in God and in a future life! What sacrifices of self, what freedom from worldly motives, what spirituality of mind, what unruffled patience, what steadfast confidence and animating hope, do they denote! Whatever the wisdom of the Egyptians in which he was instructed, nothing short of a revelation from Heaven could have so raised him above the mind of the flesh, and fortified him against the promptings of self.

Nor can there be less foundation for the Christian's confidence than there was for Moses's faith. Be it so, that he was supernaturally called of God; yet faith is now, not less than it was then, “the evidence of things

not seen ;” and to the eye of faith all the things which it embraces have as real an existence as material objects to our bodily vision. The more they are made the subjects of reflection, the deeper is our conviction of their reality—so deep, as to seem, at times, the only realities ; just as consciousness may be made to evolve a truer conviction of the existence of spirit, than even the senses furnish of the existence of matter. Hence, the believer in God’s word, in view of the evidences with which it is accompanied, the nature of its discoveries, the adaptedness of its provisions to the wants of his spiritual being, the cloud of witnesses to the truthfulness and preciousness of its promises by whom he is encompassed, may say, with as true and firm a conviction, as though Christ had appeared to him in person, *I know that my Redeemer liveth !*

Yes ; He of whom Moses wrote, and for whom Moses voluntarily suffered reproach ; He to whom all the prophets bore witness, and for whom the apostles rejoiced that they were “counted worthy to suffer shame,” is “the same yesterday, to-day, and forever.”

He has different spheres of duty and usefulness for his followers, and different ways of testing their fealty ; but to each, in turn, is he now saying : “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” We may not be called on to choose affliction, but we are required to deny ourselves ; and why do we ever hesitate, but that our faith is weak, and our love cold ? Why so apt to compromise with this vain world—to yield to the seductions of sin, but that we are prone to forget, why it is we are here, and whither we are fast

journeying ? Yet a little while, and *eternity*, in all its changeless realities, breaks upon our view ! And is it so, that *heaven* awaits Christ's faithful followers ? Well may they leave all sinful gains and joys to those who will have no better portion beyond the grave. Nay, come what may to flesh and blood, the *Christian* will resolutely refuse to do that which he knows to be wrong—refuse ever to betray the interests of religion for any worldly end.

Duty rather than interest ; reproach rather than the honors of ambition ; poverty rather than the gains of iniquity ; yes, suffering—any suffering with the people of God, rather than the soul-destroying pleasures of sin !

THE GRAVE OF LUSTS.

Soon after their deliverance from the Egyptian yoke, the children of Israel began to murmur, and at last even reproached themselves, saying: "Why came we forth out of Egypt? Our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes!" "The mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting: and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? And there went forth a wind from the Lord, and brought quails from the sea, and let them fall by the camp, as it were a day's journey on this side, and as it were a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp; and as it were two cubits high upon the face of the earth. And the people stood up all that day and all that night, and all the next day, and they gathered the quails: he that gathered least gathered ten homers: and they spread them all abroad for themselves round about the camp. And while the flesh was yet between their teeth, ere it was chewed, the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague. And he called the name of that place Kibroth-hattaavah: because there they buried the people that lusted."*

In view of such a scene, our first impression is, that

* Num. xi. 4-6, 31-34.

the Israelites must have been extremely ignorant and degraded ; and we feel almost impelled to dismiss it from our contemplations with sentiments of disgust. It seems to be nothing more than an instance of excess working out its own punishment—such as often meets us in the history of some barbarous horde, or such as the glutton or the inebriate always brings on himself. In this light, it has been regarded by infidels ; and in any other relation, it would be of little importance to us. But as it forms a part of the sacred narrative, a regular and consistent history, it is worthy of note, if for no other reason than to ascertain its credibility.

It is not improbable ; though objections have been raised to the narrative on account of the immense number of quails said to have fallen. But that the sacred writer meant to express the number very indeterminate, is evident from the qualifying terms—“*as it were* a day’s journey,” and “*as it were* round about the camp,” and “*as it were* two cubits high ;” while the word here translated ‘homers,’ may signify, as in Exodus viii. 14, heaps in general, without defining the quantity of each heap. It is, moreover, the testimony of travellers, that at certain seasons quails flew in great numbers.

Such writers as Hasselquist and Diodorus, state that they were to be seen in immense flocks in the deserts of Arabia, near the shores of the Dead Sea, and about Rhinocolura ; countries through which the Israelites journeyed : and hence there is no necessity for guarding the credibility of the narrative, by supposing that the Hebrew *salvîm* denotes *locusts* instead of *quails*. If the majority of learned men, such as Josephus and Philo

among the ancients, and Bochart and Gesenius in modern times, had not decided in favor of the meaning of the word as given by our English translators, the term which the psalmist employs in referring to this event in the history of Israel is conclusive : “ He caused an east wind to blow in the heavens, and by his power he brought on the south wind ; he rained flesh also upon them as dust, and feathered fowls, *ôph kânâph*,—a term never applied to insects—“ like the sands of the sea ; and let fall in the midst of their camp round about their habitations.”*

Nor is it difficult to explain the reason for spreading the quails “ round about the camp.” This mode of preserving certain birds of passage, according to Shuckford and Maillet, was usual among the heathens. The Egyptians were in the habit of drying fish,† as the Arabs dry camel’s flesh, in the sun and wind ; and if so, the Israelites probably had the same end in view, in spreading the quails round the camp in the burning sands.

Nor does it impair the credibility of the narrative, that the Israelites reproached themselves for having left Egypt. On the contrary, this circumstance imparts to the whole an air of truthfulness that otherwise had been wanting. While in Egypt, any condition might have seemed preferable to a state of vassalage ; Moses, an angel of light, in comparison with their cruel taskmasters. But whatever their sufferings there, all is forgotten, save the few hours of relaxation from toil they might have been occasionally permitted to enjoy, and the few animal indulgences shrewdly granted them by their mas-

* Ps. lxxviii. 26–28.

† Conf. Herodot., lib. i., c. 200.

ters, to render them more tractable, and more reconciled to their lot. With great avidity they seized the first opportunity of deliverance; and they began their journey in all the ecstasy of recovered freedom: but their visions have not been realized. It is a longer and more difficult journey than they had anticipated. They have become weary and dispirited; the manna has lost its sweetness, and the promised land is yet afar. Under such circumstances they would be apt to go back in thought even to Egypt—to lose sight of past toils through the irksomeness of their present journey; to be indifferent to all prospective advantages, through their desire to gratify tastes which have revived in all the force of youthful impressions. Thus it is that the sea-sick voyager longs for land, and fondly fancies that he could there be content with the simplest cot and the rudest fare; or that the immigrant often casts a wistful eye to the home of his youth, though the privations of that home urged him away to seek his fortune in some more favored land. In short, the rebellious feelings of the Israelites may be traced to causes not unlike those which now frequently result in mutiny on shipboard, or in the dissolution of a company of travelling adventurers. Nothing is more common than for men to murmur, and to regret the very step they had voluntarily taken, when they find themselves deprived of the comforts to which they have been accustomed; perhaps, when they are unable to gratify their appetite for some particular diet!

Nor is it improbable that so many of the Israelites should have died in consequence of indulging their taste

for animal food. They had been a long time confined to the use of the manna ; and it is a fact in human experience that much flesh after protracted abstinence can seldom be eaten with impunity. But it does not therefore follow, that the effects of their surfeit was not a judicial punishment. If God be the author of the laws of the human system, the natural consequence of violating these laws, is an unequivocal expression of his displeasure ; but in the case of the Israelites there was a special interposition of Providence ; nor does it militate against our position, that both the supply and the judicial infliction were brought about in accordance with the laws of nature. An event may be not the less of God's special ordering, because it can be explained on natural principles. Separate from the design of Heaven in working a miracle, but few events recorded in the Scriptures can be viewed as strictly supernatural ; while others must be received with great allowance for that proneness to hyperbole which characterized all oriental forms of speech. Thus that the sun and moon stood still at the command of Joshua ; that the hand went back ten degrees on the dial of Hezekiah ; or that the flames did not consume the three Jews who had been cast by an idolatrous monarch into the fiery furnace, were in the highest sense of the word, *miracles*. But their credibility—aside from the character of the sacred record—arises not merely from the fact that He who made the elements may control them at his sovereign pleasure ; but that it was his design to convince the fire-worshippers, that whatever their malignant efforts against Israel, even their own gods were subject to the Lord God of Israel.

In the event under consideration, the miracle consisted, not in the immense flocks of quails which furnished a superabundant supply for the whole camp ; but in the fact that they came up from the sea for the space of a month, by a wind from the Lord, and were directed to a particular spot, within a circuit of about ten miles. The Israelites had dared to rebel, because they thought they should die unless flesh were given to them—thus adding presumption and insult to the basest ingratitude. It is God's design to rebuke their excuseless distrust of his providence ; to convince them that he can destroy his enemies and preserve his friends ; that he who had overthrown Pharaoh and his hosts, could defend and support them ; that he who had sent them manna, could, if he saw fit, send them flesh ; that all the elements, and all creatures, are subject to his control ; and in this respect, the miracles of the quails is in keeping with other events recorded in the Scriptures. He who thus miraculously supplied the wants of the Israelites, is the same being who ordered the ravens to feed Elijah, and the lions not to hurt Daniel ; who sent a fish to furnish Peter with the tribute-money ; and at whose fiat the waters were divided, and the rock poured forth water, and the clouds dropped manna.

On a former occasion the Almighty had most mercifully supplied them flesh ; but now, since the sufficiency secured to them by God's wonderful providence has served to render them only the more dissatisfied, and they crave quails, thus unnecessarily and unsubmitively, quails they shall have ; and in the consequences of their sensual gratification, as well as in the desires by which they

are actuated, they shall be made an example “to the intent that others may not lust after evil things.” The miraculous supply of quails, therefore, was ordered as a punishment; and hence the event embodies a principle of God’s providential government; and it meets its moral illustration whenever and wherever inordinate desires for worldly good are cherished.

In nothing may the Past be more strikingly seen in the Present, than in the consequences of following “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes.” As was the relation of the Israelites to the Theocracy, such is our relation to Providence. The desires by which men are now apt to be influenced—their inordinate longings, imaginary wants, and unsanctified wishes, have their parallel in those divers lusts and passions which drowned them in destruction and perdition; and the place in which they that lusted were buried, shadows forth the Kibroth-hattaavah of the soul. The Israelites might not have believed that such punishment awaited their sensuality; nor do men now reflect on the evil consequences of indulging their hearts’ lusts; but the laws of God’s moral government are as unchanging as the laws of his physical kingdom, nor may any man violate them with impunity. The proof of this may be gathered from the Present as well as from the Past.

That all should be desirous of exemption from the gripe of necessity, or the disquietudes of want, might be expected; and were this desire controlled by a conscientious reference to the proper ends of life, it could result in no harm to our moral and spiritual being. The

difficulty is, we are not apt to be satisfied with the supply of our real wants, any more than the Israelites were with the manna. We wish for more, or for something else, either that the evils of poverty may be at a greater remove from us, or that we may gratify the pride and vanity of our hearts. Hence originates the desire for great riches, extended power, and resplendent honors. Whatever is of value in the eye of the world, and tends to exalt ourselves, to secure to us the obeisance of others, and to multiply around us the comforts and luxuries and adornments of life, is the object of desire, and often of immoderate desire. The savage must have the white man's glittering trinkets ; and the white man must equal, if not outshine, his neighbor. In every condition of society, the desire to have what others have, is, to a greater or less degree, common to all ; but in places of commercial enterprise and resort—where diversities of trade stimulate competition, and ingenuity is taxed to devise ever-varying forms to captivate the fancy ; where expedients are contrived to distinguish self from the crowd, and the pride of the rich and the interests of the poor, unite to render money the insignia of rank, the exponent of influence, and the medium of display,—*covetousness* becomes the all-absorbing passion, infecting the body politic ; rendering men restless, more susceptible to outward impressions, fond of changes, and, in not a few instances, as miserable if they cannot gratify their fancy, as the poor Israelites, who wept because they wanted flesh to eat.

It requires no very discriminating analysis of the human heart, to ascertain the nature of the desires by

which such are actuated. If we are the creatures of the same Providence, no one is of more importance in the scale of being than another : factitious distinctions aside, we occupy the same level ; and our respective interests are one and the same. Hence, we are forbidden to covet ; and at the same time, it is enjoined upon us to love our neighbor as ourself. To desire all things therefore, that all things may contribute to our private ends, amounts to an assumption of our own personal superiority ; it implies, also, a virtual infringement of the rights of others ; and we have yet to see the moral difference between the man who appropriates to his own use what does not rightfully belong to him, and the man who covets what he may never have. In either case, the emotions of the heart must be the same, and selfishness the controlling power. This renders him regardless of others, except so far as they can be made to subserve his interests ; blind to the proper uses of the things of this life ; and insensible to his indebtedness for what he already has, and to the great end of God's dealings with him.

The present, is a state of moral discipline. Our Creator would prepare us for the employments and joys of "a better country, even an heavenly." Those of his gifts that are gratefully and moderately used, he continues, unless it be necessary for him to test our fidelity ; those that are, or will be abused, he resumes, unless he has seen fit to leave us to ourselves. All things are ordered according to the councils of his own will — wisely ordered and beneficently overruled to the good of those who love him, and to the glory of his own name.

But what is this economy of Providence—so radiant with the marks of wisdom and goodness to every humble mind—to him who “lusts after evil things?” His feelings brand it with partiality, injustice, and folly. He virtually says unto the Almighty, that He does not act on the principles of strict rectitude; that he himself has a right to what has been withheld or resumed—is really more deserving than others; he, ignorant and short-sighted as he is, says unto the Omniscient, that he knows what is best!

If we only reflect on the character and government of that Being who is disclosed to us in the Scriptures, we can be at no loss as to the light in which *he* is viewed by the Divine mind who is ever ungrateful for what he has, and covetous of what others possess; at once un-submissive to God’s will, and imperious in his own; regardless of God’s honor, and intent solely on the gratifications of his fleshly lusts.

But whence is it that one becomes dissatisfied with his lot in life? In his neighbor’s condition, there is, to his view, entire relief from all the inconveniences to which he is subject; and there, too, are the advantages of which he is destitute. Suffering his imagination to lead captive his judgment, it seems to him, *there* is happiness, and he would gladly exchange conditions. Thus he desires riches, not that he is in anywise necessitous, but because he imagines “a man’s life to consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses;” and thus the costly mansion and the splendid equipage become associated in his mind with the appropriate means of worldly enjoyment. He desires eminence, not that he

is unknown, or would subserve his reputation to useful ends ; but it would gratify him above all things, he imagines, to see his movements publicly noticed, and hear his name repeated from lip to lip with sentiments of praise. He desires relief from the toils and turmoil of business—visions of rural retirement visit his slumbers—all his efforts are directed to this end : not that he would avail himself of his leisure to enlighten his mind, and improve his heart, and benefit society ; but that he may spend the rest of his days in affluent elegance and luxurious ease. Such a man is “ of the earth, earthly”—his desires betray the state of his heart ; and are they not wrong and foolish ? Not, if this be our “ continuing city,” or death, annihilation. But what shall we say, if this life can be proved to be only the infancy of an immortal existence ; and if every soul of man has interests at stake to which all worldly interests are less than nothing, and vanity ?

Hence, God warns men to “ abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul ;” and charges them to “ set their affection on things above.” But if, in spite of the teachings of his word, and the warnings of his providence, they still crave earthly things, their desires are not unfrequently gratified. And here it were easy to particularize, and show how this man, and the other, has at last obtained the desire of his heart and the delight of his eyes ; but instances will readily occur to the reader, drawn from his own observation, and perhaps his own experience. God might not have been consulted—all reference to the Divine pleasure might have been intentionally excluded : while intent on his darling

end, the man might have been conscious of his designed forgetfulness of God—his pure, defecated worldliness of spirit ; and yet God, in his providence, favored him in his endeavors—as it were, yielded to his desire—just as he granted the request of his ancient people, when, at one time, they desired flesh to eat ; and again, that they might have a king to reign over them ; or, as he yielded to Balaam's desire, and gave him permission to go to Balak.

Hence, the sentiments with which God regards us, cannot be inferred from the worldly circumstances in which we are placed. We might be forward to conclude, from the remarkable success which attends some men, that they are the objects of the Divine approbation : they are often called the “ favorites of fortune ;” but there is now one man in hell who, while upon earth, was “ clothed in fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day.” On the other hand, we are prone to say to ourselves, ‘ What sin has this man committed, that he should be so destitute and afflicted ?’ But there is now a man in heaven who, when in this world, “ was laid at the rich man's gate, and fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table ; and whose sores moreover the dogs came and licked.” So true is it that “ God's thoughts are not as our thoughts.” “ That which is highly esteemed among men, is abomination in the sight of God.” The very things which the carnal mind desires, may be the evidences of his displeasure ; while those from which our nature shrinks, may be the tokens of his love. He may give in anger, and refuse from love to the souls of his children. In hedging up our way with

thorns, he may mean to satisfy us with his favor; but by indulging us in our earthborn desires, he may mean to leave us to the sway of our pride, and indolence, and carnality. In so doing, however, he himself is in no-wise implicated in the sin and misery of his creatures. "Let no man say when he is tempted, 'I am tempted of God;' for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then, when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

It is true that spiritual interests are seldom heeded by those who cherish immoderate desires. All they think of, or seem to care for, is earth. The ardor of the Israelites in gathering the quails, furnishes no unapt image of the course pursued by many worldly men. As the former "stood up all that day, and all that night, and all the next day, and gathered the quails," so do the latter sometimes sacrifice ease and sleep for worldly ends—

"Add night to day, and Sunday to the week."

To gain their heart's desire, no opportunity must be neglected, no time lost, no labor spared; and all this for the meat that perisheth! So much "wiser are the children of this world in their generation than the children of light."

The Israelites, in their efforts to gather the quails, had no concern for God's favor; and thus, in their worldly aims, men seldom take into consideration the moral bearing of a successful issue. It matters not with what deprivation of religious privileges their course may

be attended—it must be prosecuted. Though such overtasking of their mental and physical powers may disqualify them for the proper discharge of their religious duties, still the work must be done; that is, the *quails* must be *gathered*. We cannot trust God for the future; we must get enough, though we have now more than a sufficiency!

But as “the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, even while the flesh was yet between their teeth,” so do men often covet what they will never live to enjoy. “Ere the flesh was chewed, the Lord smote them with a very great plague:” and thus, ere the estate is enjoyed which cost a man so many toilsome days and sleepless nights; ere the gold is coined for which, in his covetousness, he abandoned the sphere of duty and usefulness where God had placed him, and exposed himself to toil, and hardship, and demoralizing influences; or, just as he is reaching forth to grasp the prize for which, in his all-absorbing desire of fame, he had waived the claims of Him who endowed him with intellect for nobler ends—*his soul is required of him!*

Thus, also, may we sometimes see those very objects for which men “lusted exceedingly,” wrested from their grasp almost as soon as gained—the riches for which they longed making themselves wings, and flying away; or the fame for which they panted, rendering them only the more conspicuous marks for obloquy, or uplifting them with pride until they paved the way for their own downfall. Sometimes desire is gratified, but at the expense of health, and, it may be, with the loss of character; or when the object is gained, it disappoints expect-

tation, and precludes peace of mind. No matter what it is that is sought so eagerly—whether it respect some affluent connection in life, the cultivation of a particular talent, the perpetuation of a name, or the enjoyment of a home—so surely as that object is allied to self and earth, it may be made “a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling-block, and a recompense.” Even the child that was longed for, may die ere it opens its eyes on the light, or live long only to bring its parents’ “gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.”—“Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?” As the most beautiful plants are most deleterious in their properties, so those objects in life which gratify the eye and stimulate the passions, may be the most inimical to our peace. From some fancied attendant evil we often dread what is good for us in a temporal point of view; and thus, in consequence of some fancied attendant good, we often desire what proves to be, on the whole, a temporal evil. Lot lifted up his eyes and beheld all the plain of Jordan, and chose it, because “it was well watered everywhere.” It never occurred to him whether it would be the best country for one who had a religion to honor, a soul to keep, and a family to bring up in the fear of the Lord. He was influenced solely by the beauty and advantages of the soil; he chose as a worldly-wise man, not as behooved a servant of the Most High; and what were the consequences but vexations, losses, disgrace, desolation, and dismay? The country of his choice was doomed of Heaven; all his coveted possessions were involved in the common overthrow; his wife was con-

verted into a pillar of salt; some of his children perished, and those that were rescued might better for him have been swallowed up with his guilty sons-in-law!*

If, therefore, our immoderate desires for worldly good often result in temporal evil, much more may such desires tend to the injury of our spiritual interests. The nature of the human mind will not admit of two co-existent desires of equal strength and fervor: the one

* "The gods," said one of the heathen moralists, "have overwhelmed in ruin whole multitudes, merely by indulging them with every thing for which they asked;" and he is but a limited observer who knows not, in this respect, the vanity of human wishes. But, having been left to the guidance of their own understandings, the ancient pagans were led to observe narrowly the course of human events. Hence, in Plato's Dialogue on Prayer, Socrates is represented as saying to his pupil, who was going to his devotions, that "it became him to be very serious on the errand, since it was possible for one to bring down evils upon himself by his prayers; and that those things which the gods sent in answer to his petitions, might turn to his destruction. This, he said, may not only happen when a man prays for what he knows is mischievous in its own nature—as *Ædipus* implored the gods to sow dissension between his sons—but when he prays for what he believes would be for his good, and against what he believes would be for his detriment; because men from ignorance, prejudice, or passion, are so blinded that they cannot see what would be really beneficial. He then asks his pupil if he would not be delighted, should that god to whom he was going to pray, promise to make him the sovereign of the whole earth; and on receiving an affirmative reply, asks again of his pupil, if, after receiving this great favor, he would be contented to lose his life—or if he would receive it, though he was sure of making an ill use of it. Socrates then shows him, from the examples of others, how these might probably be the effects of such a blessing; and adds that other reputed pieces of good fortune, which men ardently desire, and would not fail to pray for, if they thought their prayers would be answered—such as having a son, or procuring the highest post in the government—are subject to the like fatal consequences." Having established this point, that no man knows what, in its consequences, would prove to him a blessing or a curse, he recommends to him, as the model of his devotions, a short prayer of a Greek poet: "Give us those things which are good for us, whether they are such things as we pray for or not; and remove from us those things which are hurtful, though they are such as we pray for."

must give place to the other. Hence, whenever our earth-born desires approach an unreasonable height, our spiritual desires are correspondingly depressed. As well attempt to identify God and mammon, as blend inordinate desires for worldly good with spiritual aspirations. We may render the forms of religion subservient to worldly ends ; but undue desire for any worldly object is necessarily at variance with all advancements in the Divine life. In proof of this, we might advert to Christian experience—show what changes, in their sentiments and actions, have come over even good men, when they have been taken captive by some worldly desire ; how it has gradually led to a loss of their wonted interest in the private duties of religion, and finally to a neglect of God's word and ordinances ; how that wealth which was toiled for with such restless avidity, has, in some instances, impaired all sense of dependence on God, and given rise to pride, and self-indulgence, and conformity to the world—though before, the man might have been distinguished by his humility, and self-denial, and spirituality of mind ; and how that fame which was coveted, under the quieting plea of extending one's influence for good, has at last become the end and aim of all his movements, and brought him down in his ways of life to a degrading level with those whose praise is not of God, but of men.

Worldly men need not tell us how they feel in relation to the subject of religion : their actions too plainly reveal their sentiments. He whose heart is set on riches, puts forth no effort to attain the “pearl of great price :” and, in like manner, he who is intent on liter-

any acquisitions, or on the praises or pleasures of the world, has no desire for that wisdom which cometh from above, that honor which cometh from God only, or that peace which flows from communion with God and from the discharge of duty to man. No; that soul, which was made for God and heaven, has lost sight of its birthright, and is now stooping to a degrading thralldom!

The moral consequences of following the heart's lusts might be viewed in different forms, and traced through different relations. He who thus sets out to gratify his selfish desires, may become as regardless of man as he is indifferent to God. Let him hanker after any worldly object, and if he cannot obtain it by fair means, Ahaz-like he will ultimately break through the restraints of virtue and religion. Hence those crimes which invoke the arm of civil justice—those deeds of darkness which cause us to tremble, if not for ourselves, at least for our children! Who knows what a day may bring forth for that man who has surrendered himself to the control of fleshly lusts? Enter yonder mansion: it is the house of mourning, but not for the dead; for the living, worse than dead—the living abandoned to his vices. Or go to yonder prison-house: what means that piteous spectacle? Wretched man! he is suffering the penalty of those selfish desires which led him on from vice to crime!

Be it so, that such evils are the extreme and only occasional results of lusting after worldly good; yet the very object for which men are so prone to “walk in the sight of their eyes,” cannot be attained. What world-

loving, self-seeking man was ever heard to say, "'Tis enough !' It requires but little observation of the world to be able to trace the course of our natural desires. Yonder is a man driven to his daily task under the scorching heat of a tropical sky : he knows no motive but fear, no signal but the lash. Ask him what he desires ? 'Purchase my freedom.' Is he now, being a freeman, happy ? He has forgotten the necessity of an estate. Well, is the rich man happy ? Not until he is invested with dignity and honor. He is happy now ? No ; he must surpass his neighbor, or stand high without a rival. Grant him, then, the insignia of sovereign rank and rule—he is not contented. Decorate his brow with the laurels of victory—still he is not contented. Give him the crown of universal empire, and he will sigh for more worlds to conquer. Give him all things which either his sensuality, or his avarice, or his ambition, may crave ; and then press home upon him the question of content. The morrow will find him just as unsatisfied as he is to-day ; and the reason is, that he has surrendered his essential being—his *soul* into captivity to his earth-born appetites. "There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men : a man to whom God hath given riches and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth, yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof."

By the very gratifications which he coveted, the man has rendered himself more unhappy than he would have been had all his desires been denied ; for now he is waking up to the conviction that all here "is vanity and vexation of spirit." Nor is this all : with him the greater

part of life has been passed in the pursuit of shadows ; and he cannot but be aware that a being formed for an endless futurity, has been merged in perishing interests ; that though his temporal concerns have flourished, his spiritual have been sadly neglected !

Such is the occasional experience of those who have lived to gratify their worldly desires ; and, though some may have thereby been led unto serious and timely reflection, yet the soul is often ruined by those very objects for which it so importunately wished, and sedulously labored. Though it may at times feel the unsatisfying nature of all earthly things, will it be an easy matter to let go its hold on objects to which it has become so wedded by desire and effort ? Is it in accordance with the laws of our mental and moral being, that he who has all his life long been controlled by the perceptions of sense, should be led to elevate his affections to things which can be apprehended only by faith ? Is it to be expected that he who has lived with his treasures and honors all on earth, should die at last with his heart in heaven ?

There may be hope in the last hour for many a thoughtless sinner ; nor would I presume to question the efficiency of God's grace ; but it is *God* who has been dealing with this wretched creature. God "granted his requests," and God "has sent leanness into his soul : " it is the leanness of spiritual death ; and if any thing, short of the terrors of the last day, can rouse him from this spiritual stupor, why is he so deaf to the voice of his own conscience—to the reiterated calls of God's word, and even to the daily monitions of God's provi-

dence? How happens it, that he should think less of heaven than of the most insignificant of his worldly interests; and that he actually dreads any worldly disaster more than eternal damnation? How is it to be accounted for, when he knows that he cannot live here alway, and at times feels that he has no security for his life, that he should be just as intent on worldly gains and gratifications as if there were no God!

Men may go on in the ways of their hearts, and be only the less apprehensive of future ills, when their unreasonable and unsubmissive requests for worldly good are granted. But “coming events cast their shadows before,” in those temporal evils so often consequent on the gratification of worldly desires. How solemn the thought, that all our present desires and affections go toward making up the sum of our future happiness or our future woe!—and often, methinks, will the lost soul, as it sinks lower and lower into the abyss of endless woe, *curse* the riches and honors of a bygone probation!

Men need no persuasives to induce them to guard their persons, their honors, or their property; but of how much more importance to their true interests that they should maintain a strict and constant watch over their desires! Even they who profess to believe in that gospel which has illumined life and immortality, are not the less prone to be influenced more by “the things that are seen” than by “the things that are not seen;” by the hope of present advantages than by the certainty of future good. To ward off the dangers to which we are daily exposed, let us reflect that the various objects of

earthly desire often dazzle but to blind, excite but to disappoint, and allure but to destroy ; that what seems so fair and beauteous, may conceal a viper's sting, and what seems most conducive to our happiness, may be stored with misery. Let us be sensible of our ignorance and short-sightedness, our liability to be governed more by passion than by reason, by vanity than by judgment, by a regard for immediate though transient advantages than by ultimate and permanent benefits. He who is wise will not concern himself "what this man is famed for, or for what the other is preferred ;" what this one has, or how that other succeeded. Let this man have the honor, and that the riches ; if we would avoid those passions and inquietudes to which so many are subject, let us learn rather to contract our wishes, than to enlarge our means. Amid the conflicting interests and passions of the throng, let the sentiment of our heart be that which is couched in the beautiful language of Hamet : "A little brook which in summer will never be dry, and in winter will never overflow ;" or rather, the prayer of our heart should be that of Agur : "Give me neither poverty nor riches ; feed me with food convenient for me ; lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, 'Who is the Lord ?' or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

No man can be contented until he beholds God's agency in all that appertains to his earthly lot. No one can be at rest who has not learned to wait God's time and counsel for all things ; to be thankful for whatever is bestowed ; to humble himself rather than to gratify his pride ; to mortify than indulge his lusts ; to submit

his judgment to Sovereign wisdom ; and to resign his will to unerring goodness and exhaustless love.

Experience, if nothing else, might teach us the folly of inordinate desires ; that they bring with them evil and not good, a curse and not a blessing. We cannot advert to our own experience, without regretting that some one selfish desire had not been timely repressed, or some other temptation to aggrandize self been steadfastly resisted. We cannot look around us without perceiving the ravages of fleshly lusts on the condition and character of immortal beings. Our very pathway through life is, as it were, strewn with the bones of those that lusted.

Why, then, fret ourselves “because of him who prospereth in his way?” or pity him whom God in mercy has seen fit to disappoint and try? Who shall not look well to himself, if placed in circumstances of worldly prosperity? for, though all things may be prosperous and felicitous without, yet within there may be naught but famine, and leanness, and spiritual death! And who that has set out in the ways of his heart, will not be warned betimes to extricate himself from the deadly grasp which the world is about to fasten on his soul?

There is a greater evil in life than either poverty or obscurity—than toil or trial—than suffering or sorrow : it is to be left of God “to eat of the fruit of our own ways, and to be filled with our own devices.” There is a sentence more dreadful than that of immediate death and damnation : “*Ephraim is joined to his idols—let him alone!*”

Kibroth-hattaarah! What lessons of wisdom may be gathered at that place! what solemn warnings rather

are there uttered ! There, from generation to generation, the world has buried its votaries. There are the graves of the sensual, the covetous, the ambitious. Where be their pleasures now ? their riches ? their honors ? — all the vain things they lusted after, and for which they bartered their souls ?

My soul turns in horror, and exclaims : ‘ Let *God* do with me as seemeth unto him best ; only let me be humble, grateful, and submissive ; yea, let me “ deny all ungodliness and worldly lust, and live a godly, sober, and righteous life ! ” — ever seeking “ the kingdom of God and his righteousness.” ’ *This* is an object worthy of all our thoughts and desires : for this we may ever long, and strive, and pray : it is adapted to the nature of the soul, and will fill and bless all its capacities. “ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness ; for they shall be filled.”

The children of this world must needs be skeptical of the nature and tendency of religion to confer lasting good. Infatuated by their own hearts’ lusts, they can not easily conceive of a happiness separate from selfish gratifications. To such, there is a seeming reality in the shadows they pursue ; and hence, even the disappointments and losses to which they may be subjected do not change the current of their desires. But the Christian, having awaked to a sense of his high relations, knows, from his own experience, that he is never so free from disquietude as when he is waiting upon God — so happy as when he commits his way unto the Lord ; that there is nowhere else such peace as flows from “ the light of God’s countenance.” In view of

that inheritance which is incorruptible and undefiled, O what a feeling of the vanity of all earthly things sweeps over his consciousness ! — a feeling that suffers no abatement, until, through the transforming influence of faith, he is able to exclaim : “ Whom have I in heaven but thee ? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.”

“ Give what thou canst, without thee I am poor ;
But with thee, rich, take what thou wilt away.”

THE CONSPIRACY DEFEATED.

HE who does wrong is apt to do worse, either that he may conceal the wrong, or enjoy the fruits of his iniquity. The fear of exposure, or the fear of loss, counteracts the remonstrances of conscience and the motives to repentance, until the mind becomes blinded in its perceptions of right, and the heart loses all sensibility to crime. Thus falsehood leads, as by a moral necessity, to perjury—overreaching, to forgery—libidinous desire, to the violation of domestic purity—and the wrathful passions to the destruction of human life; while each criminal deed, as it were, seeks and claims support from the other, as the degraded, wretched inmates of a prison contrive to keep each other in countenance. Sad is it to think of the transformation which human nature may undergo—from virtuous promptings and resolves, to evil passions, and polluting practices, and criminal deeds; from that which promises a useful, happy life, to all that betokens degradation and despair. But time is necessary to the development of evil propensities. Conscience must be injured by other and deeper acts of wrong, before the man is left to the unrestrained control of his own heart's lusts. Let the first promptings to evil be unresisted, the first wrong unrepented of, and

no youth may say of *what* he may not be guilty : even that bright and beautiful boy may become a monster in crime.

Thus was it with Absalom. He had given loose to evil passions, and by adding crime to crime, had at last rebelled against his kingly father ; and, not content with having wrested the sceptre from his hand, and driven him from his home, he now aims to compass his death—the bloody death of that father who had lavished on him, from his boyhood, all the smiles and favors of paternal love ! Never had a father a more lovely and promising son ; and never did a son more grievously disappoint a father's fondest hopes.

It might be supposed that Absalom's treatment of his father would have frustrated his traitorous designs ; but his personal attractions, together with his plausible address, predisposed the people to accredit his statements ; while his incipient success served at once to decide those who had wavered or stood aloof from motives of policy. In times of civil commotion, the many, without pausing to decide on the merits of a cause, will incline now to this side, and then to that, according as either gives promise of triumph ; but though Absalom's conduct must have appeared in an odious light, yet David himself had made many personal enemies—he had even given occasion for the enemies of God to blaspheme ; and it is not unreasonable to suppose, that some among his people waited but an opportunity to show their contempt of his religion, and their hatred of his rule.

It must be admitted, however, that men are seldom wanting to second the designs of selfish ambition. The

less restrained by principle, the more artful will one be in his efforts to entrap the unwary, and the more adroit in the selection of his agents. Thus it happens that a corrupt politician sometimes enjoys the support of well-meaning, but credulous men ; or that a flagrant offender in the church is, in some instances, upheld even by good men—they have been flattered by his attentions, or cajoled by his artifices : perhaps, he approached them on their blind side, and in return for the compliment, they cover him with the mantle of their charity. There were men in Absalom's train who, however opposed to some of David's acts, could not have been insensible to the heinous ingratitude of his son's conspiracy, unless they had been blinded by his arts, or seduced by his promises : these were some of the *elders* of Israel!—as men of official dignity have since been detected in advocating the wrong against the right. But others sided with Absalom, from a regard to their own interests rather than to his—opportunistically availing themselves of his conspiracy to gratify some long-cherished passion—as there are not a few at the present day who, having nothing to lose by any political convulsion, would even plunge their country into the horrors of a civil war, rather than forego the chance of personal aggrandizement. Thus men of talents without principle are found engaged in a bad cause ; nor are men of superior penetration always ingenuous. When their object is good, they are wont to effect it in a circuitous, rather than in a direct and simple way ; and thus a habit of acting is formed which impairs integrity and precludes confidence. No man is more to be avoided than he who prides himself on his

ability to devise ways and means. Rather than be subjected to the mortification of failure, he may betray others, as well as be betrayed, into iniquitous measures. He who thinks that he sees further than other men, will be tempted to overreach. At any rate, a reputation for great wisdom does not prove its possession. Many an obscure man can give us better counsel than the oracle of a party, or the chief of a profession. One may excel in worldly wisdom, yet be utterly devoid of moral principle; but wisdom without grace, is the wisdom of the serpent.

Absalom had engaged the ablest counsel in the kingdom; and to human view, this was a triumph on his part. David himself thought that he might better have lost any other man than Ahithophel. That one man is a host in himself. To receive his counsel, is as though one had inquired at the oracle of God.

Absalom therefore, in all probability, relied on Ahithophel, as men in a strait are apt to lean on their own understanding, or to defer to casual suggestions. But Ahithophel relied on himself: he could hardly have had such a reputation, and not presumed on his sagacity. We may detect this same spirit of self-reliance not less in the ecclesiastic who has distinguished himself for his politic measures, than in the statesman who has been long acknowledged as the thinking head of his party. Hence, such, sooner or later, outwit themselves and defeat their own ends. Wise as Ahithophel conceived himself to be, he made the mistake that worldly-wise men so often commit—he left *God* out of his counsels, and in so doing, lost all respect to the right. ‘*How to*

accomplish his end' is now the question: the nature of the means to be employed is of minor consideration. Hence the folly and the wickedness of his first advice to Absalom.* It proves that, with all his wisdom, he scrupled at no means to carry his purpose; it proclaims what he meant to conceal, that he felt himself to be in a false position. Having taken a most hazardous step for himself, he has awaked to the conviction that with all his penetration he has been the dupe of his own passions, and now has not so much his reputation to support, as his place to keep, and even his life to defend!

In giving his counsel, it was primarily his object to revenge himself on David, and to preclude all reconciliation between the conflicting parties; but the act proposed was ill-advised for himself, and worse for Absalom. Such an act that "blurs the grace and blush of modesty," could only render him more debauched and unreasonable, and prejudice the public mind against his rule. This Ahithophel might have foreseen; and it may be, that in giving such nefarious counsel, he had an eye to Absalom's downfall and his own exaltation. But evil counsels ultimately recoil on both the giver and receiver. The righteous may suffer long; but "the triumphing of the wicked is short."

It might be *expected* that one who had been brought up as Absalom was, would not prove a blessing to his father; and that a son who had been unrestrained in his evil ways, would ultimately ruin himself: this is according to the usual course of things. Whatever the laxity of domestic rule, or the encouragement to vice

* 2 Sam. xvi. 21.

afforded by paternal example, the son, in his downward course, acts voluntarily. Absalom might have criminated his father, but he acted contrary to his own convictions of right, and at the instance of his own selfish passions ; and therefore it cannot be justly alleged that God, in order to make good his word that “ he would raise up evil against David,” necessitated Absalom’s treatment of his father. In all his plans and movements there may be detected the signs of a self-willed and quick-witted youth ; one who could be either imperious or servile, desperate or plausible, as suited his humor and furthered his interests ; who sought pleasure as well as power ; and notwithstanding his personal vanity and violent passions, had the sagacity to secure the most distinguished counsel, and the patience to mature his plot.

Thus far all has equalled the most sanguine expectations. Absalom is in possession of the city, and the elders of Israel have rallied around his standard. The renowned counsellor of the realm is by his side ; and now, lo ! the very man who had been David’s bosom friend, espouses his side and waits his bidding. He has attained the summit of his ambition : the crown is *his* by might, though not by right ; and therefore the struggle in which he had engaged has, notwithstanding his present elevation, but just begun. Before the break of another day, his dethroned father may have fled beyond his reach, or intrenched himself in some impregnable fortress : his forlorn condition may have awakened a widespread sympathy, and a reaction may ensue in the public mind. There is no time for delay : “ each hour is pregnant with a thousand perils.”

Whatever might have been his exultation on entering the city, serious thoughts now press upon him, and sad misgivings embarrass his purpose. 'If David should cover his retreat, and at last muster strength, what must be my fate? *He* cannot pardon; *I* cannot submit. The die is cast!' Thus might he have felt, yet would he not precipitate action. He will be cautious; he will canvass the views of his adherents, and decide as to the wisest course. Accordingly, he summoned a meeting of all the principal men on his side; and it was in this council that he called on Ahithophel and Hushai in turn to give their opinions. They were men not unequally matched in foresight, though the one had been unknown as a counsellor. They were alike capable of giving the wisest counsel, but influenced in their respective opinions by conflicting personal motives. True to their own private and separate ends, though not alike true to Absalom, the one was swayed by his desire of being revenged on David, the other by his desire to reinstate David in his lawful dominion. The vindictive passion of the one rendered him bloodthirsty and desperate; the friendly sympathies of the other blinded him to candor and truth. In the counsel of the one, we detect the malignity of a foe; in that of the other, the arts of a hypocrite. The one would have destroyed David, the other dispossessed Absalom.

Ahithophel was of opinion that David should be immediately pursued, before he had time to recover from his fright; and, to this end, proposed that twelve thousand chosen men should be at once put under his command. But Hushai expressed himself to the effect that

such a movement would be precipitate and hazardous ; that David had too much foresight to expose his person, and too much courage to be easily intimidated ; that his followers were now enraged and desperate ; and that the issue of a midnight conflict, under any circumstances, was doubtful. The risk of failure was too great ; and if David should gain even a partial advantage over Ahithophel, the report of his success would be magnified, and, by consequence, the great body of the people would at once incline to his side. He proposed, therefore, that every Hebrew capable of bearing arms should be forthwith enlisted ; and that Absalom himself, to whom the honor belonged, should assume the command of the army ; and concluded by adroitly intimating that, with such numbers, he might fall on David as the dew falls on the ground—or even draw the city of his refuge, with ropes, into the adjacent river ! *

It might be supposed that the elders would have decided against Hushai's counsel ; but Absalom was the man around whom they had rallied—his pleasure was to be consulted : and though it required but little sagacity to foresee the issue of following Hushai's counsel, yet it fell in with Absalom's characteristic weakness. In this respect, bad advice differs from good : the latter always exacts some denial of self—the former accords with inclination, and serves to gratify whatever passion may be predominant. Hence, a man of strong besetting sins, though he may confer with others, usually trusts in his own heart, and unconsciously aims to justify him-

* 2 Sam. xvii. 1-13.

self in taking his own course, even when seemingly desirous of deferring to superior and dispassionate judgment. By gathering all Israel, Absalom will have an opportunity of displaying himself; and, by commanding in person, will secure to himself all the glory of victory; for, with so great an army, he at once precludes personal risk, and David's escape!

Hushai knew his man, and adroitly aimed to flatter and blind him; and thus by his management defeated counsel which, if followed, would have resulted in David's immediate and irretrievable overthrow: and it is in this way that the wisest counsels are sometimes frustrated—that the pettifogger gains advantage over the jurist, the demagogue over the patriot, the ecclesiastic over the Christian. Here is the secret of that potent influence which Jesuitism wields, and of the danger to which men in authority are liable from crafty advisers. Cæsar himself was at last conquered by his vanity:

———"I tell him he hates flatterers;
He says he does—being then most flattered."

There are times when duty calls to no arduous sacrifice of self; but, as a general rule, that advice is to be cautiously received which ministers to the gratification of pride and vanity, or to any prevailing passion. This is the usual expedient of men having their own private ends to answer, when called on for their advice—to give, not that which will subserve the essential interests of a cause, but be most agreeable to inclination and gratifying to pride. It is especially the case with those who have changed sides in a controversy or an interest;

and hence such men, whether found in the church or state, are unworthy of confidence.

Hushai had been known as David's friend, and David had probably conferred on him some signal benefits; hence Absalom's exclamation on beholding him: "Is this thy kindness (thy gratitude) to thy friend?" He was the last man whom Absalom could have expected to join his standard; and on this account, notwithstanding his surprise at seeing him, he was only the more flattered by his coming. This simple circumstance might have led him to insist on Hushai's giving his counsel: it was a compliment, he might have thought, due to one who had made such personal sacrifices for his sake. So true is it that flattery blinds our eye to the true moral character and deserts of the flatterer: he makes us pleased with ourselves, and we reciprocate the compliment by being pleased with him. Opposition itself is often disarmed by an insinuating approach and deferential address. "I hate the traitor," said an ancient general, "but I love the treason;" and it is on the same principle that men can seldom resist the influence of flattery, even when proffered by those whom they hate or despise.

Though Hushai had proposed to himself a laudable end, yet we cannot justify him in the means which he adopted. Because Absalom must be put down, is that to say that Hushai shall become a dissembler and spy? False at heart, he assumes the mask of friendship, and receives, only to take advantage of, the confidence with which he is honored. He is not to be justified, unless *they* are who, under pretence of promoting God's glory,

violate truth and justice. The actions of such may be overruled for good; but, being wrong in themselves, they are as strictly blameworthy and punishable as though they had eventuated in evil. Nor can David be entirely exculpated—though it admits of a doubt whether he instructed Hushai to violate truth to effect his end. His chief object in sending Hushai, was to be advised of Absalom's movements; and so far, a wise precaution, justified by his son's usurpation and treachery. We can hardly suppose that David acted according to the maxim—since so common in the courts of kings—that “he who knows not how to dissemble, knows not how to govern.” Perhaps he was not in a suitable frame of mind to contemplate the moral nature of an act; or, in his perplexity and distress, might not have been aware of the exact construction that would be put on his charge to Hushai. He knew that some action was imperiously necessary to arrest the progress of the rebellion, and that, whatever means might be adopted, it was not on these that implicit reliance could be placed. He is humbled and penitent—weeping, barefoot, shorn of his glory, and reduced to the last extremity. But behold, *he prayeth!* And what is the burden of his prayer? That his own life might be spared, or the life of his son—or that his enemies might be destroyed? No, but that the counsel of Ahithophel may be defeated. He knew that no one could cope with the disaffected counsellor; that whatever Hushai's adroitness, all would be in vain, unless God should interpose in his behalf—even that God who “taketh the wise in their own craftiness”—who “maketh the devices of the people of none effect”—

“in whose hand is the heart of kings, and who turneth it whithersoever he will.” He had been left out of the counsels of both Hushai and Ahithophel ; and, to human eye, there is in their respective counsels nothing out of the ordinary course of events : and the results, as in all similar cases, were apparently brought about by the one party overmastering or outwitting the other. Yet God was present in that deliberative assembly ; and, while permitting Hushai and Ahithophel to act out their own thoughts, was really and truly governing them and all their actions.

No one can look at the respective tendencies of virtue and vice, or contemplate that retribution which not unfrequently overtakes the guilty, without perceiving that we live under a government which dispenses rewards and punishments in a natural way ; nor can any one have an experience of life, without being forcibly reminded, either by some remarkable success or disappointment, some unaccountable suggestion, some sudden and wonderful turn in the course of his affairs, that “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” Who can calculate with certainty on the issue of a single plan, much less on the result of any great undertaking ? Not that there is no connection between means and ends, or no regularity in the order of human events. Were we not susceptible to the influence of motives, and did not experience teach us that, as a general rule, certain consequences do follow from a particular course of action, man would be the sport of circumstances, or the victim of fate. But, though his conduct has a bearing on his temporal condition, so that there is an inseparable con-

nection between idleness and poverty, vice and misery, improvidence and ruin—yet his wisest plans are sometimes abortive, and the fruits of his persevering industry blasted: thus furnishing abundant exemplifications of the truth of those inspired sayings, that “the race is not *always* to the swift, nor the battle to the strong;” that “promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south;”—and thereby constraining every reflective mind to acknowledge the controlling agency of some Sovereign will. And in like manner, though certain things tend, on the one hand, to national as well as individual prosperity, and, on the other, lead to the destruction of empires as well as to the individual loss of health, property, character, and life; and though we may account for great events, whether as connected with individuals or with states, on what are called secondary principles; yet may there almost invariably be detected some peculiar circumstances accompanying each event, which serve to reveal the hand of Him “by whom kings reign, and princes decree justice.”

How strange that Absalom should have given the preference to Hushai’s counsel—when Ahithophel was the man to whose judgment his father, as well as the chief men of state, had been wont to defer; whose wisdom he himself had been taught to regard as oracular, and to whose aid the success of his own conspiracy was chiefly owing! At this early stage of the rebellion, it was, too, the most short-sighted policy to set aside the judgment of so influential a man, in favor of one whose unexpected appearance under the circumstances rendered his motives open to suspicion. Absalom never

intended to act contrary to Ahithophel's advice ; and in calling on Hushai for his opinion, probably had no other object than simply to secure his allegiance, by gratifying his self-consequence. Had Hushai been a little later, or not given a humoring turn to his views, Ahithophel's counsel would have been followed. But who so ordered events that Hushai should reach the council-chamber in time, and that his views should please Absalom ? Should it be said that it is beneath God to attend to the detail of human affairs, and that it is more reasonable to account for the influence of Hushai's counsel on the score of Absalom's vanity, this would not annul our argument in favor of the extent of God's providential control ; for all great events can be traced to apparently trivial and contingent circumstances, with as much certainty as the mighty river can be traced to the trickling rill. We need not refer to other instances of Providence which may be found in the inspired records : profane history abounds with ever-varying proofs of the dependence of the most weighty interests on seeming trifles. What led to the timely defence of Rome's ancient capitol, but the cackling of the sacred geese ? What occasioned the destruction of Carthage, but the sight of a fig shown in the senate-house at Rome ? What led to the detection of the gunpowder-plot, but a letter carelessly dropped, and, so to speak, accidentally found ? What was the ultimate cause of Marlborough's overthrow, but an ebullition of passion on the part of a woman ? What chained Napoleon to a rock in the ocean, but an event not more important in itself than that which fixed him for a time on the consular throne ? Such instances might be mul-

tiplied indefinitely ; and if so, then is the history of our world, of men and empires, simply a history of God's dealings with the human family : and his providence may alike be recognised at all times and under all circumstances—in all men's movements and purposes ; in the life of every soul of man, as well as in the rise and fall of nations ; amid all the conflicting passions and interests of men, as well as in the diurnal revolution of the earth, or the ebb and flow of the ocean.

There is no such thing as chance. Every atom has its law : not a sparrow falls to the ground without Heaven's notice, nor is a hair of our head unnumbered. Chance ! it has no place in God's dominions. Even Science disowns it, while Religion shudders at the thought. Nothing can come to pass without God's agency or God's permission. While controlling states and empires, he exercises an especial care and discipline over each member of the human family. Wars, famine, plagues, earthquakes, tempests, are his messengers, and not the less so because the less apparent or the less formidable any of these influences which result in poverty and pain, or in disease and death ; those trifling things which we call mistakes, or occurrences which we call casualties. Man may draw the bow, but the Lord directs the shaft. Man may make a mistake, but the Lord controls the issue. Man may cast his "lot into the lap," but "the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord."

We have dwelt the longer on this point, because the fact that Abithophel's counsel was defeated, and in the manner to which we have alluded, not only serves to

establish the doctrine of Providence, but to show that, notwithstanding the minuteness of God's providential control, it does not interfere with either the operation of general laws, or with the freedom of choice. The laws of nature, as they are designated, are the effects of some external power: they imply the actual interposition of a force from without, and thus reveal the constant operations of Deity. In any other sense than as expressive of the uniform modes of Divine agency, the phrase is without meaning. And if this be the fact in relation to the laws of the material world, why may it not be so with the laws of the human mind? If it cannot be proved that God ever interferes with the operation of general laws—if all events are seemingly brought about by what we are pleased to term secondary principles—how can it be proved that, in his government over his rational creatures, God ever interferes with the freedom of the will, which, viewed as a law of the mind, is as clearly established as any law of the physical world? or why needs the providence of God interfere with the power of willing any more than with the power of gravitation? Every one is conscious, not of the power to think or not to think, to act or not to act—for this is not essential to liberty—but of the power to will or not to will—the power of a contrary choice; and, that in being influenced by either casual suggestions, or by arguments formally and urgently presented to his mind, he does not thereby forego the power of choice. In whatever way our acquiescence may be elicited, or our decision obtained, we are never conscious of a loss of voluntary power; and he who has influenced us, never

thinks of having destroyed our freedom. Why, then, may not God, by a secret direction of natural causes, or by giving occasion for a different train of thought, bring about any event, whether favorable or otherwise to an individual, without either offering violence to man's will, or suspending the operation of general laws. If it be said that God cannot exercise such a providence without destroying free moral agency, this is begging the question under consideration, and not only so, but determining by abstract reasoning a point which is beyond the limits of our knowledge, and at the same time falsifying the teachings of scriptural facts.

In like manner, the fact that Ahithophel's counsel was defeated, enables us, when viewed in its connections, to account for sinful actions, without reflecting on the Divine perfection. If God's providence extends to men and all their thoughts and actions, it follows that he must permit sinful actions ; that he may limit them, and will overrule them. But though he permits, it does not follow that he approves the sinful actions of his creatures ; or, though he may limit, that he ought, if holy himself, to prevent ; or, though he overrules them for good, that he does not hate all sinful actions in themselves considered—much less, that they lose their moral turpitude by being overruled for good. He could not have approved of Hushai's deception and falsehood ; yet he permitted him by such means to defeat Ahithophel's counsel. He could not have looked with complacency on Absalom ; yet he used him as an instrument, and overruled his conduct for David's good.

Now, it is clear, from both the intimations of our

moral sense, and the word of inspiration, that God is a perfect being; cannot look on sin but with abhorrence; will not hold any sinful creature guiltless; and that he will treat every man according to his deserts: further than this we may not go. God *cannot* be the author of sin; yet God must be, in some sense, the first cause of all the actions of his dependent creatures. Am I asked to reconcile these two positions? I cannot—no man can. No man can understand how God acts on inanimate matter so as to move it by the law of gravitation, much less the mode and degree of his operations on spiritual beings. “Canst thou by searching find out God?” No; but of this we may be assured—that man cannot be independent of God, nor God unjust to man.*

To show his displeasure at David’s sin, God had determined to raise up evil against him from out of his own house; and after bringing him by such means to a penitent sense of his sin, to reinstate him in his rightful possessions. Hence, all that was done by Absalom and his followers, and all that led to their discomfiture and defeat, was in accordance with the Divine arrangements: “The Lord had appointed to defeat the good counsel

* All difficulties on this subject have arisen from the assumption of wrong premises in our reasonings, or from illegitimate deductions from true principles. Dependence does not necessarily involve the idea of fatalism, nor does the idea of free moral agency lead to the conclusion that man is the sovereign of his own actions. The ground, therefore, which the author takes, is this: that man is entirely dependent on God, yet responsible to God for all his acts; that God is holy, yet permits and controls all sinful actions. Be it so, that such positions do not relieve his mind from all speculative embarrassments; still he holds to them, resting assured that whatever difficulties may embarrass our speculations here, will be cleared up hereafter; that the time cometh when God will be seen to be, and adoringly acknowledged by an assembled universe, “clear when he judges, and just when he condemns.”

of Ahithophel, to the intent that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom." We have before us, then, the Divine purpose, David's prayer, and Hushai's instrumentality. Unless God had determined to arrest Absalom in his rebellious course, neither David's prayer nor Hushai's errand would have availed; and unless David had prayed that the counsel of Ahithophel might be defeated, and Hushai had gained a hearing in Absalom's councils, the Divine purpose would not have been accomplished. There is, therefore, an intimate connection between God's purposes and human means; and the particulars of this narrative may serve to teach us, that whatever the end which God has determined, he has determined all the means essential to that end, not excepting the prayers of his people.

We are, moreover, furnished with an answer to the various objections often made to prayer—objections founded as much in ignorance of its nature as in imperfect views of the Divine economy. Prayer is the offering up of our desires for things *agreeable to the Divine will*, and therefore God's immutability should constitute no hinderance to our prayers; nor would an answer to prayer imply that he is changeable in his purposes—it would be simply an instance of his immutable rectitude in suiting his dealings with us to our character and disposition. Or, as God has predetermined all things, it does not follow that prayer is useless, unless it follows that all human means are vain for the same reason—much less that, because God knows our wants, prayer is useless; since our acknowledgment of our wants may be the predetermined means of our relief, and the

very circumstance, in our characters, that contributes to render us the proper objects of the Divine regard. Nor is it vanity and presumption in us to suppose that the great God will heed our prayers, since he himself has commanded us to pray ; and, being our sovereign law-giver, must be pleased with the obedience of his creatures.

It has been said that man has too little sagacity to resolve an infinity of questions, which he has yet sagacity enough to make ; but there is this peculiarity in all such difficulties as may embarrass his mind in relation to prayer : they *all vanish*, when, in the providence of God, he is reduced to an extremity. Whatever may have been one's sentiments on the subject of religion, let him only be placed in circumstances of imminent danger, of pressing want, or of heart-breaking sorrow, and involuntarily does he look up to God, as to the only source whence help can come. It is in such circumstances that the Christian feels only the more impelled to the throne of grace. David was a man of prayer ; but we can easily conceive that he never prayed under a deeper sense of God's sovereignty, and his own helplessness and sinfulness, than when he prayed that the counsel of Abithophel might be defeated.

There are on sacred record various instances of prayer answered : thus, in answer to the prayer of Abraham, Abimelech's family were delivered from their distresses ; and God also assured Abraham, in answer to prayer, that if ten righteous men should be found in the cities of the plain, he would spare those cities. So, in answer to the prayer of Moses, the Israelites were deliv-

ered from various evils ; of Job, God forgave the folly and sin of his friends ; of Gideon, the dew fell on the ground and not on the fleece, and again on the fleece and not on the ground ; of Samuel, the Lord thundered on the Philistines, and wrought a great deliverance for Israel ; of Hezekiah, the mighty army of Sennacherib perished in one night ; of Daniel, Gabriel was sent to explain the vision which he had seen ; and of Cornelius, an angel was sent to direct him to the apostle who should teach him the way of salvation. But amid such instances, none is so striking to my own mind as David's prayer, or carries with it so deep a meaning. What a tribute to God's omniscience and all-pervading agency ! How does that prayer serve to disclose Him to our contemplations, as presiding over all human councils as well as human actions—able to make the hidden devices of man's heart, alike with all the laws of nature, subservient to his high purposes ! Was that prayer answered ? were the counsels of Ahithophel defeated ? What, then, should be our recourse, when enemies encompass us, but *prayer*—so that God may turn their hearts ? To whom should we look but to him, when domestic troubles have driven peace from our hearth, or when political dissensions endanger the peace and prosperity of our land ? Who but he that sitteth on the circle of the heavens, can save us from evil counsels, or counteract the devices of the wicked ?

If other instances of the efficacy of prayer were wanting, the manner in which David's prayer was answered teaches us that there is *power in prayer*—a power which can control the cabinets of princes, and arrest the

desolating march of war ; before which the haughtiest ruler may hang his head as a bulrush, and the wisest statesman stand convicted of his folly.

Many in Israel might have looked on David's cause as hopeless. His enemies in their triumph reproached him, saying, "Where is now thy God?" He is denounced as a bloody man, and stoned by a rebel. But penitence is opposed to despondency, meekness to injuries, and prayer to policy. Strange contrast does he present to those who had driven him from his throne ! While they are exulting in their success, he is shedding bitter tears ; while they pride themselves on their numbers, he prostrates himself in the dust on account of his sins ; they are plotting against his life, he giving himself unto prayer. Despise him who may, as a weak and foolish man, unworthy to have the rule of a nation. The worldly-wise are still too prone to look down with sentiments akin to pity on one who prays. But that prayer of David's prevailed with God, to the final overthrow of Absalom and his followers !

What befell Hushai we know not : doubtless he felicitated himself in having cajoled Absalom ; but as no mention is afterward made of him, it is probable he fell in the general battle that ensued between the king and the insurgents.

But where is he who had joined the conspiracy under so strong a persuasion that he would be the oracle of the party ? That boasted wisdom of his has been turned into foolishness. And where now are his ambitious plans ? what is there to support that high estimate of his powers which scorned comparison with the "muddy-

pated" throng? Instead of enjoying the power and place which he had anticipated in reward for his counsels, disgrace and punishment due to treason stare him in the face. It were vain, however, to attempt to depict the passions which racked his mind—his contemptuous hate, his wounded pride, his disappointed ambition, each giving place in turn to the agonizing conviction that all is lost. To have espoused the cause of a hairbrained youth, only to be at last subjected to so deep a mortification; been on the eve of final triumph, only to witness the most ruinous counsels prevail over his clear and certain judgment—was an ordeal to which his moral strength was fearfully unequal. Too much outraged to submit to the indignity offered to his wisdom, and yet too proud to return to his allegiance; foreseeing Absalom's ruin, and the king's vengeance, dark thoughts take possession of his mind; and he returns to his home, not to give vent to his contending emotions, nor to brood in sullen silence over the wreck of his proud hopes, but to "set his house in order!" Strange that the associations of home did not calm his troubled breast—that the warm welcome and kindly words of its once-loved inmates did not cause him to relent in his fell purpose; but he was not the man to waver, having once come to a decision, much less to draw back from any deliberate resolve. To avoid the ignominious end of a traitor, he dies the awful death of a suicide!

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom. Ahithophel, notwithstanding his wisdom, *died as a fool dies*. His death has been recorded as a warning to all who think, by their own far-sightedness, to overreach God's

providence. He who "thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think," will yet see another preferred before him. He who leaves God out of his counsels, will in due time be left of God "to eat of the fruit of his own ways." Sooner or later, every Ahithophel is "snared in the work of his own hands," and sinks into the pit of his own digging.

Men may say in their hearts, "There is no God;" or impiously inquire, "What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?" Still, God reigns. He will confound the wisdom of the wise, humble the proud heart, and overrule all evil counsels to the furtherance of his own sovereign purposes.

Ahithophel sought to compass David's death; but, in so doing, dug his own grave. In like manner, Caiaphas conspired against the son of David, and flattered himself that he had succeeded; but that "one man" who, for expediency's sake, "was put to death for the nation," declared himself to be the Son of God with power, by his rising from the dead. Yes; he rose—to pour shame on the wisdom of the Sanhedrim, to abash the lofty looks of his enemies, to assume the sceptre of universal dominion, to overturn and overrule, until "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ!"

THE SELF-IDOLATER.

THE historical Scriptures cannot be read with profit unless the object for which they were written be kept in mind ; and this was, not to gratify curiosity, much less to silence cavils ; not to transmit the knowledge of Hebrew manners and customs, nor an account of every thing that happened to the Hebrews as a people ; but to record only such occurrences as were best adapted to illustrate the Divine authority of their religion,—to set before them an abstract of God's proceedings ; and, in furnishing posterity with an instructive view of the Divine attributes, to exhibit in the depravity of a miraculously governed and divinely instructed nation, the necessity of that redemption which had been so early promised by the prophets.

Though the sacred historians did not derive from Revelation the knowledge of those things which might be gathered from the common sources of human intelligence—from public records and authentic documents ; yet were they restrained by God's spirit from registering material error ; and, as they had an acquaintance with the counsels and designs of God, and often revealed his dispensations in the clearest predictions, it follows that they were at times directly inspired, as they were

always superintended by the Holy Ghost. Hence their unity of design—the grand moral purpose of all such matters as they relate. Viewed in this light, each portion may be rendered subservient to our spiritual culture; and it is with reference to this that the historical Scriptures should be read; not to detect flaws or urge objections; not to display our “knowledge of science falsely so called,” or to furnish ourselves with weapons for controversy, much less for uncharitableness and abuse; but, as it were, to ask one’s self, “Of what sin does this convince me? or against what danger does it warn me? Is my deportment suitable to this description or good example? or do I see myself here, under another’s name, reprov’d and condemn’d? Have I acquired that sense of my own need of atoning blood and sanctifying grace, which the whole tenor of Scripture inculcates? or am I still inclined to stand or fall by my own righteousness?”

Viewed in any other light than as indited by God, or separate from the purpose for which they were designed, the histories of the kings of Israel are of no more account to us, than the fabulous reign of Sesostris, or the tales of the Genii. But though God’s voice in sacred history may not be heeded, it must be heard; though the inspired record may be degraded to a level with national annals, its fidelity to the workings of man’s heart and conscience, to the established order of things in this world, to the issues of human plans, and to the consequences of departing from God and duty, cannot be intelligently denied. The same men, under other names, exist now; the same things, in other relations,

are done now ; the same changes in moral and religious character are now too often seen ; and the disastrous results of human action, in any given case, may always be traced to similar defects in principle or errors in life, which require no prophet's eye to detect, though to expose which, a prophet's fidelity be often needed.

But we may not anticipate the relations to our own times, of Asa's history.*

Toward the close of his reign, the king of Israel adopted measures to check the emigration of his subjects, and to reduce the power of Judah ; and Asa, instead of deferring to the authority, and respecting the providence of the Most High, solicited foreign aid, and consummated by sacrilege a treaty with an infidel king. Such an act imperiously demanded, and as promptly received, the Divine rebuke. But instead of thankfully receiving the admonition of God's faithful servant, Asa forthwith imprisoned Hanani, and oppressed those who ventured to show their just disapprobation of his conduct. These acts bespeak any other views and feelings than such as became a man whom God had placed on the throne of Judah ; and had we no other information respecting him, we should conclude that he must have been malignant in his temper and despotic in his measures—a bad man, alike void of integrity, of candor, and of faith. This conclusion would seem to be only the more reasonable, when we found that he had received his early education from Maachah, the daughter of a noted idolater. But no man is to be judged from any one act ; much less does any one act justify a sweep-

* 2 Chron. xvi. 7-14.

ing conclusion against his previous character : nor is it consistent with the results of observation, to argue too positively from early impressions to their ultimate development in the life. We know that the tendency of a good education is too often counteracted by the world's appeals to pride and selfishness ; and, on the other hand, that subsequent religious instructions may more than make amends for early disadvantages — serving, in some instances, to rectify wrong views, and change the heart's desires. Too much importance cannot be attached to the inculcation of right principles on the youthful mind. As are the impressions of the youth, such will be the actions of manhood. This is the general law in the formation of moral character, and all exceptions from it do but go to show how great must be the power of depravity, when it cannot be held in check by the hallowed influences of a religious education.

But notwithstanding the untoward influences to which his youth was exposed, Asa, on succeeding to the throne at his father's death, was reputedly pious. By what means he was led to proper views and sentiments in relation to the divinely authorized polity of the Hebrew nation, we are not informed ; but it is certain that, in the transactions to which we have referred, he acted against his knowledge of God, against his past belief in Providence, and against his remarkable experience of the Divine goodness and faithfulness — contrary, too, to the specific instructions and faithful warnings which he had been wont to receive and value. No one could have expected that he would be guilty of such conduct, for he had been signally favored by Heaven, and eminently

prospered in all the measures of his rule. He who now invokes the aid of Benhadad, once called on God, and, with inferior forces, defeated the mighty hosts of Zerah; he who now puts his trust in an idolatrous monarch, had but lately caused his people to enter with himself into a solemn engagement on no account whatever to forsake the true God, and had even expelled his own mother from the court, because she persisted in her idolatrous practices; he who now casts the bearer of God's reproof into prison, and in the violence of his temper oppresses his people, once listened reverently and submissively to the voice of the prophets, and exerted himself with singular vigor to restore the worship of Jehovah to its primitive magnificence. Hence the futility of all arguments in favor of one's innocence, drawn from his past character.

Asa's history furnishes a sad instance of flagrant departure from the ways of God's commandments; and as such, demands serious reflection—even close and patient scrutiny into its probable causes.

We are wont to urge men to embrace religion, but seldom think of the danger of our own relapse into the ways of the world. We are wisely solicitous that the young should be brought to the knowledge and belief of the truth, but too often neglect to caution the aged against the temptations to which they themselves are exposed.

By referring to the record, it will be perceived that, during the greater part of his reign, Asa gave evidence of being a just prince and religious man. He expelled the Sodomites, and eradicated the vices which his prede-

cessor had sanctioned in the land. He abolished the idols, and the altars, and the groves, belonging to the high places, and commanded his subjects to worship the true God. Rest was given to the land, and this he improved in carrying on the work of reformation, in fortifying his frontier cities, and in raising a well-disciplined army. It might be supposed that he was naturally led to vaunt himself on his success, and to rely on the force of his arms; but we have as yet no reason to conclude that he has forgotten his dependence and obligations. On the contrary, he deeply realizes his need of Divine protection, and most humbly invokes the aid of Heaven before engaging in his unequal warfare with the Ethiopian king. As, under that economy, the Divine favor was always enjoyed so long as the king retained his allegiance, God crowned his arms, though greatly inferior in force to those of his enemy, with signal victory; and Asa, on his return to Jerusalem, devoted himself anew to the work of reformation. The things which his father had dedicated, with the greater part of his late spoils, he consecrated to God; and having repaired the altar of burnt-offering, sacrificed there all the oxen and sheep he had taken from the Ethiopians. Acting under the influence of Azariah's charge to him to be strong, he ceased not in his efforts, until every symbol of idolatry was swept from the land, and the people to a man had bound themselves not to forsake the Lord their God. In consequence of this, Azariah was commissioned to assure him of the Divine protection and favor, and for some years Judah enjoyed a state of profound peace: the worship of Jehovah was maintained—his ordinances

and statutes were observed ; and so prosperous was the land, that multitudes of the pious Israelites, dissatisfied with the state of things under their king Baasha, flocked over day by day to Asa's dominions.

In thus conducting himself, and promoting the interests of religion, we admit, as is stated, that his heart was "perfect"—that is, he was sincere ; but, though thus perfect, might not a false zeal have mingled with his purer impulses, and his work been prosecuted with too much animal excitement ? If so, there was danger of a reaction, and, with a change of circumstances, he would become indifferent just in proportion to the excess of his zeal ; and in the absence of all outward excitements, seek his pleasure in sensual indulgences. Amid the repose and abundance of his realm, there must have been temptations to sloth and luxury, which, if not steadfastly resisted, would gradually impair his sense of dependence, and inflate him with pride.

Such evils are wont to ensue, as over-excitement in well-doing subsides, or success in the work of reformation gives rise to self-complacency. Religious enthusiasm, though not at variance with the most perfect sincerity, is proverbially evanescent. Mere feeling may be mistaken for principle ; and, when this is the case, a man may become not merely indifferent to the cause which he had honestly espoused—he may yet be seen to undo all that he had so zealously done. Thus, Joash lived to restore the groves and the idols which in his zeal for reformation he had once destroyed ; and, although Asa cannot be chargeable with such flagrant inconsistency, it is obvious that he must at last have

insensibly lost his horror of idolatry, or he would not have formed an alliance with an idolater, and purchased his friendship at the expense of the Lord's treasures.

In like manner, whatever may be one's fervor of devotion, or his humility in times of trial, unless habitually circumspect and prayerful, he will not be able to withstand the corrupting influences of long-continued prosperity. Years had passed away since the last idol that polluted the land had been burnt in the valley of Hinnom; the immense forces of Ethiopia had been routed and dispersed; no enemy dared now to invade the borders of Judah; while, in the meantime, its resources had been developed, and its population greatly increased. Asa has become a great king, not less in his own estimation than in the view of surrounding nations—entitled to pre-eminence, not less on account of his achievements at home and abroad, than his hereditary possessions and personal dignity. See how the wicked fear him, and the good praise him; how strangers crowd his presence, vying with each other in every mark of deference and respect; how at last sycophants gain his ear for selfish purposes, and flattery distils its poison into his heart. Great king! the conscious favorite of both God and man! How can God ever withdraw his protection from one whom he has so signally honored? how can the people object to any thing their renowned and successful sovereign may propose? Baasha has indeed poured an army into the country of Benjamin, and thinks to overawe Jerusalem by the fort which he has suddenly built at so strong a post as Ramah; but Baasha is only envious of his greatness, and Asa will defeat him

with his own weapons. Baasha, conscious of his own weakness, has secured by treaty the aid of Benhadad, the king of Syria; but Asa will show his sagacity in breaking that treaty, and in securing to himself the Syrian arms. The arms of an idolater may be turned against so idolatrous and wicked a king as Baasha; and if Benhadad can be conciliated, and his friendship secured, he himself may yet throw away his idols. Thus, in the pride of his heart, might Asa have reasoned; and when *such* ends were to be answered, the treasures of the Lord's house might be not injudiciously appropriated! Self, however, was at the bottom of his movement, not the glory of God—self, which sought to demonstrate to an envious neighbor the superior tact and resources of Judah's king; self, which now so often seeks its gratification at the expense of truth and right. There can be no surer criterion of self-idolatry than to act irrespectively of God and duty. Though good ends may be proposed, the use of exceptionable means betrays a heart devoid of confidence in God's providence, and all deference to the authority of his law. Asa had dethroned all the gods of wood and stone; but he has come at last to bow down to an image which is enshrined in the recesses of his own bosom. He will wage war in union with an idolater, for that wicked king Baasha has insulted the majesty of his own proud image! Success will ratify the wisdom of Asa's policy, justify his sacrilegious act, impress the terrors of his arms, and extend the limits of his beneficent rule!

But the sequel proves that success is no criterion of right. Instigated by the valuable presents which he

received from Asa, and by the hopes of extending his power, Benhadad forthwith invaded the northern parts of Baasha's kingdom, and compelled several cities to surrender ; while Asa, from the south, retook Ramah, and, with the very materials which Baasha had employed to fortify it, fortified for himself Geba and western Mizpah. Such a movement proves that Asa was a man of no ordinary forethought and energy ; and, did we not know to the contrary, we might infer, from the favorable opening of the campaign, that God had not disapproved of the measures which Asa had taken to defeat his enemy. But the fact that Hanani, by Divine direction, sharply rebuked him for his treacherous application for heathenish aid, and the profane use which he had made of the consecrated treasures, proves that the enjoyment of outward good is no evidence of Heaven's approbation. Men may prosper in their unhallowed gains, rise to the world's high places, or revel in luxury and roll on the wheels of splendor ; but their violations of truth and honesty, their intrigues and slanders, and selfish use of those talents which belong to God, are all marked against them in the book of his remembrance, and will one day be brought home to their guilty bosoms. Had Asa been defeated in battle, he would have admitted the justness of the prophet's rebuke ; but he was exulting in the issues of his treaty : and the fact that God had prospered him in his aims, seemed to give a practical refutation to the prophet's charge, and to place him in the attitude of a pragmatist and censorious man. No men in their thoughts and actions are further from God, yet none oftener presume on his favor, than they

who have succeeded in their ambitious or avaricious aims. It is their success that infatuates them, rendering them insensible to their sins, and proof against conviction.

Success even in a good work may be as hazardous to religious character as in any worldly concerns. That honor which belongs to Him "from whom all just works do proceed," may be virtually appropriated by the man himself: spiritual pride sets in to vitiate singleness of purpose, and remissness follows, to end in apathy or in selfish indulgences. The greater his success, the greater his danger, and the more need for watchfulness against the suggestions of a proud and deceitful heart; nor is there any more insidious foe to personal piety than personal popularity in God's service. It is familiar to observation, that but few are able to withstand the combined influence of success in their efforts and attention to their persons. The lamentable effect is visible in a change of address, if not change of living, until self-confidence and self-esteem sanction exceptionable means; or the proud, imperious will betrays itself in the man's scorn of reproof. Asa's unbounded success, and the flattering attentions which he received from the pious Israelites, more than any other causes, led him to forget his dependence and obligations; and in this respect his history is fraught with solemn lessons to every one whom God has raised to an honored pre-eminence in his service.

It is strange, we think, that he could have lost sight of the deliverances which he had experienced—of the outstretched arm that had aided him in achieving the

victory over his numerous enemies, and in effecting so great a reformation among his people: but it is not so remarkable as that Hezekiah should have been actually proud of the miracles wrought in his behalf; and, instead of declaring the praises of God before Baladan's messengers, so far forgotten himself, through their flattering attentions to him, as vainly to show them every thing rare and valuable in his treasures. *So* have I seen a man displaying *self*, when he should have been a true witness for God—parading his intellectual trinkets to gratify personal vanity, when he should have been true to the hearts and consciences of his admirers, that he might save their souls from death! Are such circumstances too trifling to notice?—Asa involved himself in unceasing wars; Hezekiah brought on himself and his subjects the wrath of the Lord; Uzziah, for the sin of displaying self in the temple of the Lord, was smitten with the leprosy: and where is the man, whom the pride of success or of popular favor infatuates, that shall not yet be rebuked by Providence, or brought to humble himself before God for his idolatry of self?

But when one is seen to fall from the standard of truth and duty which he had proposed to himself, or to counteract the work to which he was ostensibly devoted, we may not respond to the harsh judgment of the world, and denounce him as a hypocrite. He may have mistaken animal feelings for the influence of the Spirit—his love of action and excitement for the love of truth and duty—and deceived himself, without being conscious of any wrong views; or, not being on his guard against his besetting sins (his pride and vanity, or his

love of self-indulgence) he may have been led away before he was aware of his danger. Asa was never perfect, that is, *free from sin*: in *this* sense the word is not scripturally employed; but he was sincere, and in this respect “his heart was perfect all his days.” He was opposed to the worship of any but the true God, and would suffer no idol to pollute the land; and it is supposable that he might have presumed on the ground of his work, and making a merit of his devotion to the interests of true religion, been led, through the deceitfulness of sin, to think that, by purchasing Benhadad’s friendship, which seemed so essential to the effective defence of his land from the invasion of an idolater, he should not incur the Divine displeasure.

It is natural to men to offset the discharge of one duty against the neglect of another; to rely on the Divine favor, in consequence of having once done well—perhaps performed a great work! though they may now be conforming to the ways of the world and countenancing its errors. Such, however, are not hypocrites. No one justly merits this opprobrious epithet who does not knowingly avail himself of religious usages for selfish purposes—or intentionally, for the sake of either reputation or gain, assume an appearance in public which his private life belies. Yet a sincere man will have his imperfections—as Asa, notwithstanding his zealous devotion to the true religion, permitted the “high places” to remain; nor in his backslidings may one be less sincere in his view of essential truth, and in his professed attachment to the church of God. This very consciousness of sincerity may often facilitate self-deception; and

in no other way can we account for the anomaly of an orthodox head and a heterodox life. The hypocrite could not fail to condemn and loathe himself, were not his heart hardened ; but the backslider, by hoodwinking his conscience, contrives to hope.

It is painfully evident that, without formally casting off their allegiance to God, men may depart from him in spirit. To this end worldly prosperity especially contributes, and hence it is so hazardous to the integrity of Christian faith and practice. It is not uncommon for men, as they rise in the world, to lose sight of Him to whom they owe the success of their secular undertakings—thus conforming more and more to the ways of the world, though flattering themselves that they are true to the church ; conciliating the friendship of the world at the expense of Christian principles, and for selfish ends contracting alliances without regard to the will of God or the honor of religion. There is no longer any prayerful deference to God, or confidence in his word, much less an eye single to his glory ; though his name may still be named, and the ordinances of his house formally observed. Thus, self becomes the governing principle, and a worldly policy the rule of life. Thus, religious character undergoes an essential change, until it is difficult to admit that he who now gives forth all the evidences of self-idolatry, was once an humble worshipper of God—this proud and politic worldling, once a zealous reformer, perhaps a burning revivalist !

Those very prosperous circumstances in which the man is placed, and which should render him the more

grateful and humble, often serve only to minister to the heart's native passions, until self becomes arbitrary and imperious. Who could have thought that the king who, in his extremity, had so humbly called on God, would, in his prosperity, act independently of God? who once solicitously inquired the path of duty, would at last resent the least intimation of his sin? who once banished from his realm every idolatrous priest, would, in his rage, imprison a prophet of the Lord for simply reminding him of God's forgotten mercies and faithful promises?

So great a king was not to be reproved by any man; not even by a prophet of the Lord! And thus it is, that they who have been uplifted by prosperity, and who consequently idolize themselves, can endure no opposition, much less brook reproof. Flatter such you may, and you will be their friend; but to reprove such, or even to venture a wise caution, a timely suggestion for their good, is to be regarded as their enemy. This is known to be the case; and hence, men who have been raised by Providence from circumstances of poverty or obscurity, and who now stand high in affluence or in honor, are seldom told their faults. But few will venture on the perilous errand of faithful Christian rebuke; because they who do, oftener than otherwise, meet with the reception that Hanani did from the king—'Who are *you* to reflect on my character and course? I *know* the estimation in which I am held. Behold my success. See how many have sought my patronage, and what alliances I have formed! It is the suggestion of envy, or the charge of malice.' So true is it, that no man

idolizes self more than he who resents Christian reproof for his sins.

But he who sins against the light of truth, and rejects admonitory counsel, will probably be left to himself. The king is not ignorant that God governs the world in wisdom ; that all his creatures, in all places of his dominions, are under his immediate inspection ; that he orders and will overrule all things for “ Jacob his servant’s sake, and Israel his elect.” He has even known from his own experience, that God will show himself strong in behalf of those whose hearts are upright before him ; but now he leans to his own understanding, and relies on an arm of flesh, practically renouncing his belief in God’s universal providence ; and, more than all, will not allow a prophet of the Lord to interfere with his worldly purposes.

But shall not the judgments of Heaven bring him to a sense of his sin and folly ? We have no reason to suppose that the wars which the prophet denounced against him, and in which he was involved for years, might have led him to reflect on the past, and penitently return in heart to God. What would have been the issue of his conflicts with Baasha we cannot say ; but he is now to be arrested in his selfish schemes and godless battles. The time is at hand when he must bid farewell to his greatness, and close his eyes on the scene of his pride. The repeated assaults of a mysterious disease are fast making their way to the citadel of his heart. Asa is stretched in agony on his dying bed ! And do not abused mercies and neglected warnings and excuseless sins rush to his remembrance ? Does he not send for

the injured prophet, and entreat his forgiveness, and an interest in his prayers? Is he not reminded in this the hour of his dire extremity, that no being in the universe can help him, save that God who listened to his cry, when the huge hosts of the Lubims threatened to swallow up his kingdom? All that man can do for him his physicians are now doing; and does he not even look unto God to direct and bless human means for his recovery? No; even in his last hour he relied not on God. He who put his trust in Benhadad, now puts his trust in his physicians. There is no intimation that he repented and was pardoned, as in the case of David; or that he cried unto God when brought down to the gate of death, as in the case of Hezekiah. All that is said of him is that “he put his trust in his physicians.” There is a significancy in this, which renders comment almost unnecessary. He put his trust in his physicians—that is, in *man*, not in God. That God, in whose service he had been employed and honored—who had so greatly prospered and enriched his country; interposed for his deliverance from the power of a ruthless enemy; sent his prophet in all kindness to expostulate with him; and even aimed by his judgments to bring him to a penitent sense of his sin—that God, for whose sake he himself had abolished all false gods, and with whom he had once compelled his people to enter into covenant—is left out of view, as though he had been an ideal being, and had no control over life and death. In his last hour Asa knew no God but self. Perhaps his physicians burned incense to his idol; and, by flattering his vanity, blinded him to his condition. Be this

as it may, he died trusting in them. This was his last act !

Thus die the wicked—their last act, their last utterance, their last thought, is *sin* ! And are we to conclude that when a man becomes estranged from the principles of the gospel, loses all that is spiritual in religion, gives himself up to the devices and desires of his own heart, and dies in his impenitence, that he will be made holy at death ? This is the prevalent impression ; but it is no less unphilosophical than unscriptural. What greater absurdity can there be, than to suppose that the dissolution of the body regenerates the soul ? As well conclude that the putting off our clothes at night changes our physical nature. But as we awake from natural sleep to revolve again the thoughts and to renew the devices of yesterday, so shall we awake in eternity to the consciousness of having the same character which we sustained in time ; with this difference only, that our thoughts and feelings will then be inconceivably vivid, and that we shall find nothing there as here to blind our eye to the true character of our moral self. Character at death, is character for eternity. Amid the scenes and interests of earth, man may exclude the thought of God and retribution ; but to *die* is to be disabused of all false impressions, divested of all the infatuations of self-love, denuded of all but conscience ! to *die*, is to burst on the feeling of unmingled good, or of unmitigated evil—to be conscious of nothing but the presence of God as our friend, or our enemy—it is *heaven* or *hell* to the soul !

But notwithstanding the exceptionable and sinful acts

of his reign, though the manner in which he died was equivalent to a practical renunciation of that religion which he had at first labored with so much diligence to re-establish, yet the people did honor to his remains, and buried him with great pomp and ceremony. Had he been as holy a man as he was a great prince, they could have done no more to testify their appreciation of his reign, and their respect for his memory. His treacherous alliance was nothing to them, so long as Asa returned victorious ; his treatment of the prophet, and of those who sympathized with the prophet, of no consequence, while their private interests were not affected.

Thus judges the world ; whatever a man's character, though it may have been at variance with truth and righteousness, if he had only distinguished himself, they will gather around his bier in all the imposing pageantry of grief. No inference, therefore, in favor of one's future condition, can be drawn from the manner in which he was interred. Where man has erected a mausoleum, God may have written I-CHABOD !

Every man should have a grave, as well as a house ; and so live as to be always prepared for death, and that, *at* death, his remains may be carried to their last home, not in pomp, but in sorrow. But Asa digged a sepulchre for himself ; and it is not improbable, left directions that he should be interred after the magnificent manner of the Gentiles, and not after the way of the Jews. If so, he was not singular ; others have done the same to gratify their vanity, and distinguish their remains from vulgar earth. The same vain regard for posthumous display is still extant. It provides for the

splendid funeral and magnificent tomb ;—forgetful of the solemn truth, that, though the body may be embalmed, the soul may not be saved ; though it may be encased in costly work, and let down into the grave amid the gaze of the world, it may rise at last “ to the resurrection of damnation !”

FACTITIOUS RELIGION.

THE Bible is a book of principles : it furnishes us with the elements of truth, and with the motives to duty—so that, as rational and accountable beings, we may be controlled by principle, and always able to assign a reason for the sentiments we adopt, and the course we pursue. It recognises no religion that springs not from “a new heart and a right spirit,” and promises rewards only to those whose perseverance “in every good word and work” unto the end, gives assurance that, in commencing a religious life, they were neither deluded in their views, precipitate in their decision, nor reserved in the devotement of themselves to God’s service.

There is a wide difference in the circumstances in which men are placed—in their educational advantages and natural temperaments, and, by consequence, in their besetting sins and individual temptations : still, the criteria of true religious principles are essentially the same. Nor does religious character in all ages and conditions invariably present the same phase. It is at one time contemplative, and then active ; here cheerful and hopeful, there melancholy and desponding ; here elevated by noble thoughts and generous doings, there contracted by ignorance and deformed by bigotry ;

now revealing the mastery of the spirit over the flesh, and again so blending in its features with the lineaments of the world, that, as with the colors of the rainbow, we find it difficult to separate or distinguish the one from the other : nevertheless, all essential defects in religious character, as well as all instances of backsliding and apostasy, *spring from the heart* ; for out of it “ proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies,” and out of it “ are the issues of life.”

As “ in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a *new creature*,” so he alone was truly a Jew who was one, not outwardly, but inwardly. As all true religion is now directly traceable to regeneration, so was it, under the Old-Testament dispensation, to “ the circumcision of the heart.” We are not called on to examine ourselves with a view to ascertaining whether we have conformed to the letter of the law, but “ whether we be in the faith ;” for “ with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” Nor are we cautioned against the neglect of days and ceremonies, but against “ an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God :” an *evil heart*, this constitutes the great obstacle in the way of becoming religious—the source of self-deceptions and hypocrisy—the cause of inconsistencies, declensions, and apostasies. It may be retained while the mind is receiving the ideas of a religious education, and conforming to all ceremonial enactments—amid works of charity and zeal for religion, and all due deference to the ordinances of the church and the authority of her ministers. It may not preclude useful-

ness and honor in the cause of the church. The world may never know that he who seems so devoted is not in sincerity and truth a believer; he himself, through self-ignorance, may not suspect that his is still an evil heart of unbelief; nor may he be aware of it until it is too late: he may even carry it with him to the grave, and not until the day of judgment will he know that he had only deceived himself! All were not Israel who were of Israel: all are not the disciples of Christ, though they may "eat and drink in his presence, and do many wonderful works."

The more prominent one may be in religious matters, the greater the danger of his being deceived by this evil heart; and so long as he retains his position and his associates, he may go on in well-doing, but a change of circumstances may bring about a change in the outward man. Were this not so, the gospel had not been so emphatic in its cautions to all, without distinction, against "the deceitfulness of sin:" and that we are not mistaken in our view of that heart-religion which the New Testament inculcates, is evident from the record with which the Old Testament furnishes us, of the lives of men who, on the one hand, secured God's acceptance, and, on the other, incurred his displeasure.

In the fancied superiority of their own intellectual attainments, some may consider it as nothing more than a record of deeds which denote an ignorant, obstinate, and superstitious people; still, it is a truthful and faithful history of human nature—and hence invaluable as a guide in all our religious and ethical inquiries, and indispensable to a true knowledge of ourselves. Nor

let it be thought, as infidelity has insinuated, that it is a monotonous record of acts void of interest to the present age, and of characters that differed in no essential points of view. Nowhere can greater variety in character be found, not excepting the *dramatis personæ* of Shakspeare himself; nor is there an individual, at the present day, who has not his prototype in the historical Scriptures. Even Shakspeare was indebted to his acquaintance with the Scriptures, not less than to his own observations, for his knowledge of human nature. He will, indeed, give us a knowledge of the world in all its glory and in all its littleness, its honesty and its tricks, its loves and hates, its joys and sorrows, its follies and foibles; he will throw a spell around our hearts, and lead us to look on one another, and on all the men and women in the world, as but players: but to the Bible must we go to behold ourselves as we are, and life as it is, in solemn earnest—something more than a dumb-show, and men something higher than puppets—nothing less, in fact, than actors in a stupendous drama, which has its issues, not when the drop-curtain of death falls, but when the *trumpet* sounds to summon man to judgment.

Here, as in a mirror, may we see the part which we are individually acting, the interest we are to secure, the changes we are undergoing, and the dangers to which we are exposed. There are men now, who answer to the prophets and to the kings of old; places and objects now, corresponding to the unhallowed groves and the accursed idols: there is, too, the murder of the heart, which is the counterpart to the murder of a prophet;

and there is a death shadowed forth by the end of a life which had been forfeited by sin.

Hence the interest and importance that belong to the history of Joash.* He had been brought up under circumstances most favorable to the culture of early piety ; and it was to be expected, from the instructions he received, and the example set before him, that he would take a deep interest in his people, and aim to promote their welfare by restoring the house of the Lord, and reviving the temple-service, which had been sadly neglected during the period of Athaliah's usurpation. Though very young, he had an intelligent appreciation of the great ends of his government, and brought to the accomplishment of his measures an energy that commanded respect, and a zeal that argued triumphant success. His were no ordinary qualifications for the duties of his reign ; and the manner in which he effected his object, shows that he was not less sagacious and honest than active and influential. His was the master-spirit of the age, acting on lethargic minds—impatient of delay, devising new plans, stimulating curiosity, causing an excitement through the land, until every man was forward to contribute, and every workman eager to do his part.

The work of repairing the temple was nobly done, though paid for in advance ; and the money, over and above what the workmen deemed a just compensation for their labors, was refunded, and converted into suitable vessels for the house of the Lord—an instance which has few parallels. Men are seldom forward to contrib-

* 2 Chron., chap. xxiv.

ute, except for their own pleasure ; and rarely think themselves overpaid for their services — especially those intrusted with the public treasure, or in any way employed by the government.

But thus auspicious was the beginning of his reign : “Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord.” And who that witnessed his deeds, would not have concluded that he was truly a religious prince ? How remiss and indifferent did all the priests and Levites seem in comparison with Joash ! how much more strenuous and zealous in his efforts to repair the temple than Jehoiada himself ! The old counsellor was too tardy for the young king, and in his view merited at least a gentle rebuke ! — just as the youthful convert in our day cannot conceal his surprise at the seeming inefficiency of those whose sole business it is to repair the waste places in Zion !

But Jehoiada had lived too long not to be able to discriminate between acerbity of temper and the impatience of an ardent temperament ; and so long as he lived, Joash complied with the Divine requirements, and all things contributed to establish his government, and secure the growing prosperity of his people. Nor is it singular that Jehoiada’s influence should have been so great over the youthful king. He was no ordinary man — no less remarkable for his wisdom than his years. Having attained his hundred and thirtieth year, he embodied the history of six successive reigns. He could speak of what he had both seen and heard of the glory of Solomon, and of the idols of Jeroboam ; of the gracious works of Elijah, and the bloody deeds of Athaliah :

yet amid all the changes and evils which had occurred in Judah from the days of Solomon to Joash, he had remained true to God. Great and good man! amid such varied scenes, neither seduced by flattering promises, nor intimidated by royal threats; neither uplifted by success, nor depressed by adversity; conniving at no evil, and neglecting no opportunity of doing good—at once pure in life, strong in faith, and steady in principle, he received from the priesthood not less than from the people the reverence due to exalted worth and beneficent services. What is the glory of crowns compared with the lustre of such a character? what the honor of warriors triumphing in successive battles over their fellows, compared with his, who, through a long century of trial, had fought the fight and kept the faith, and come off conqueror over the world, the flesh, and the devil? Such an instance, gleaned from the dark records of human depravity and crime, revives our sinking spirits—tells us that there is faith on earth, and the sure and certain hope of God's eternal favor. All do not wax worse as they grow old; all do not change with circumstances—suit their policy to the times, and cringe and fawn to further selfish ends; nor are all “carried about with every wind of doctrine.” The tempest will scatter the leaf, and twist the sapling, and uproot the proud pine; but the aged oak still stands.

At last Jehoiada dies, and is interred, not with common mortals, nor with departed priests, but in the sepulchre of the kings—even there, where he who slew Goliath was stiff in death, and he whose glory attracted the queen of Sheba, was mouldering in the dust. It was

the highest honor that men, in their earth-born conceptions of greatness, could pay to his remains ; but among all the kingly great ones who there slept, of which could it be in truth said, that he had lived only to do good ? Some had done evil ; others evil as well as good ; but Jehoiada good alone : and while one is remembered for his exploits in the field, and another for the magnificence of his reign, and others for their idolatries and folly, his memory will be cherished for his singular goodness. The epitaph that marks his tomb in distinction from the rest is, "*He had done good in Israel.*"

For the time, none felt his loss more than Joash ; none shed bitterer tears, or surpassed him in honoring the remains of his lamented counsellor and friend. What had Joash been, without Jehoiada ? To him was he indebted, under Providence, for his education, his restoration to the throne of Judah, his success in repairing the breaches which had been made in the temple—for his present enviable position and cheering prospects. Jehoiada had sheltered the young prince from the dangers of Athaliah's rule, and prepared him to assume the reins of government ; and when the nation grew weary of the usurper, had placed the rightful crown of David's lineage on his youthful brows. And can Joash ever forget his counsels ?—Forget ?

There is one who has set out in a career of dissipation and vice ; yet so long as his father lived, he gave promise of a life of duty and usefulness. There is another who has surrendered his mind to false prophets, and is worshipping at a strange altar ; yet so long as his Christian teacher lived, he adhered to truth, and went

up to the courts of the Lord's house. However great may be the force of personal influence, it is familiar to observation, that when a father's head is laid in the grave, his children are apt to go every one his own way ; and so, when a minister of the gospel dies, how often does it happen that some among those who were wont to hang on his lips, depart from the ordinances of the sanctuary !

No sooner had Jehoiada's sun gone down in all its full-orbed splendor, than men who had hid their diminished heads, came forth ; and others who liked not the old-fashioned religion, then ventured to speak aloud their sentiments ; men, too, who had been envious of Jehoiada, then perhaps insinuated in the hearing of Joash that his loss was not so great as he imagined, and that he needed no counsellor wiser than himself—men who, like all unprincipled dependents, knew how to flatter and fawn for their own ends.

The king is in more imminent danger than if the Syrian hosts were hammering at his gates, or assassins lurking round his palace. He need not fear for his country, nor his life, so long as he remembers Israel's God : his person is inviolate, his city impregnable, while he enjoys Heaven's favor. Has he not been taught to know this from his youth up ? Was not Jehoiada a living witness of God's covenant faithfulness ? Has not he himself had an experience of the blessedness of God's service ? To whom is he indebted for all his advantages and honors, but to God, through the instrumentality of the good Jehoiada ? Already, though but a few moons have passed since the old man was laid in his grave, has Joash, who so truly bemoaned his death and honored

his remains, begun to surrender his mind to influences adverse to the teachings and example of his venerated friend.

How vain is it to conclude, from one's past character, that he must needs be innocent of the crime with which he now stands charged ! This Joash, once so zealous for the true God, is now just as zealous for Ashtarothe ! who once moved the kingdom to repair the Lord's house, now leaves the house of God, and calls on all to aid him, without delay or reserve, in building groves and erecting idols through the land !

Could nothing better have been expected of any king in so dark an age, and amid so rude a people ? Is it in keeping with much that forces itself on our notice, as we look into the history of that period ? Perhaps the very man who now sits in contemptuous judgment on the sacred record, was brought up amid the lights and influences of the gospel—wont to go up to the courts of the Lord's house, and even entered into covenant with the Lord ! Wherein, then, does such a man differ in principle from Joash, if so be that he has left the house of the Lord to serve the groves of sensual pleasure—to bow down at the altar of Philosophy falsely so called—or to worship the gods of mammon and ambition ? Joash's change was owing to influences not dissimilar from those which now so often result in transforming the youth of promise into the abandoned profligate ; the humble, generous poor man into the proud and selfish rich man ; the zealous, sensitive religionist into the frigid, callous formalist ; the kind husband and affectionate father into the domestic tyrant.

Joash wanted a religion more in conformity with the notions of some of the princes of Israel. He had probably been flattered into the idea that it would be more for his respectability ; for thus the “good old way” is not unfrequently abandoned. Some other form of religion has the patronage of worldly greatness or of literary renown, or it is the religion of the gay votaries of fashion. Indeed, none are more forward than worldly religionists to pour contempt on the “good old way ;” none make greater efforts to proselyte, nor rejoice more in the success of their seductive arts—though their victim has, by his apostasy, branded the memory of a pious father, and violated the covenant of his youth. So did the princes rejoice when Joash left the house of God, and served the groves and the idols !

But there were men in Judah who grieved over his apostasy, and sighed bitterly when they reverted in solitary thought to the days of the good Jehoiada. We can imagine how they humbled themselves before the Lord, and searched their own hearts to see whether any secret sin of theirs had caused the Lord to withdraw his protecting favor from their nation ; and their own lives too, whether they had in any way deviated from the paths of duty, and thereby furnished others with a plea for going to the greater extremes. At first they might not have been able to accredit all that was said of Joash. It was too improbable that a man so instructed, and who had done so good service, would in any wise sanction idolatry. He cannot proceed to extremities, and undo all that he has done. One friendly monition will lead him to pause. Can he but be induced to think of *him*

whom he once so deeply revered, he will reproach himself and penitently retrace his steps. Mistaken people! Joash is not a man to be influenced by motives which sway your conduct. Joash has no susceptibility to the sentiment of duty. Joash is not an apostate—his heart was never true to God. He is the same man he ever was—only in different circumstances, and with different advisers. All the religion he ever had was vested in Jehoiada; and when he died, the king's religion died also.

Still, it is right to expostulate with him: fear may restrain, if higher motives do not influence him to repent. The time has come for God's people to speak out boldly, though calmly—respectfully, but with all faithfulness.

It does not, however, become any one to set up his own judgment in religious matters as an authoritative rule for others. When left to the operations of their own minds, or to the promptings of their own hearts, men will differ in their conclusions. Unless there be some divinely authorized standard of truth and duty, we ourselves may be as justly obnoxious to blame for our views and practices as other men for theirs; and they, notwithstanding the contrariety of their religious opinions from our own, may be equally worthy of the Divine acceptance with ourselves. In the absence of a Revelation, all men are alike in the dark as respects the great things pertaining to God and the soul. They may differ in their mental and physical condition, but do not in their need of Divine authority for the principles of their religious belief. The heathen were left to the law of

conscience ; and, though this had become perverted and obscured, they were not to be judged by any other law. But unto Israel God had “written the great things of his law.” Yes ; there was the LAW which had been delivered amid the thunders and lightnings of Sinai—reiterated in the hearing of successive generations—and still to be seen engraven on tables of stone, and enshrined in the holy of holies ; which carried with it, in the experience of the past, blessings or curses, life or death, as men had either obeyed or disobeyed its precepts ; that law which Jehoiada had revered, and which his son, notwithstanding the king’s defection, has not ceased to reverence and obey.

Zechariah stood in the same relation to that law, by virtue of his Divine commission, that the sworn magistrate sustains to the law of the land. He could not stand by and see that law violated without criminating himself ;—under such circumstances, silence would have been treason. Still, he did not denounce, but expostulate—did not even oppose his own opinion to the king’s, but simply referred him to the law. By that law which no earthly power had enacted, nor could contravene—that law which the king himself had once sworn to observe, and which could by no man be violated with impunity,—the groves and the idols were not to be tolerated for a single moment. Most insulting to the Majesty of heaven and earth, they provoked his hot displeasure.

Methinks I see that holy man—standing there, in the midst of that idolatrous throng, without fear, though not without emotion ; strong in the consciousness of

his duty, yet almost overcome by sad thoughts which struggle for utterance. To him, God is the Supreme Reality, and God's law the Supreme Authority. In comparison with him, all the gods of the heathen are less than the small dust of the balance ; in competition with his statutes, all human enactments but as "the spider's most attenuated thread!" But the prophet is *alone* in his conceptions ;—no heart there beats in unison with his. None could deny what he affirmed ; but none would assent. No one ventured to refute his position ; but all with one voice resisted what they deemed an intrusion. They acted toward him, as men always act who hate the truth, and knowingly reject it, or are convicted of sins which they do not mean to renounce : as the mob act, when confronted by the law of the land ; or Romanists, when called upon to test their creed and conduct by the teachings of God's holy and authoritative word. As the former are wont to assail the officers of the civil government, or the latter, with invective and at times with missiles, the teachers of God's word, so did the apostates of Judah maltreat this holy man ; and at last they stoned him to death !

No event in history surpasses this in atrocity and guilt. What horror must have seized the righteous remnant in Judah on the intelligence of such a deed ! What dismay paralyzed their hearts ! So good and gentle a spirit rudely treated—foully murdered ! and that, too, in the court of the house of the Lord ! A righteous man sacrificed to the malice of the wicked ! A servant of God, as it were, abandoned of God to the fury of apostates, because he had dared to do his duty !

Such an event well nigh staggers faith, and quenches all holy aspirations. Why attempt to serve God, if we may be thus requited? Does God really love the righteous, and respect the interests of his cause on earth? Such might have been the thoughts of those who had fondly hoped that Zechariah's mission to the king would be the means of arresting him in his idolatrous course. Such are wont to be our own first thoughts, when the Christian missionary is sacrificed to demon gods; for Zechariah is only one of thousands who have been cruelly put to death because they were true to God.

But so surely as God exists, such events could never have taken place without his sovereign purpose; and if so, his providences are to be improved, not misinterpreted. Encouragement is to be derived, not from visible success, but from the consciousness of being rightly employed. Duty is ours—results belong to God; and happy the man of God whom Death meets at the post of duty!

It seems strange, as in the case of Zechariah, that any servant of the Most High should be cut off in the midst of his usefulness—at the very moment when his labors could least be spared! But this arises from the presumption that *we* are the best judges; know when and where God's servant should close his work; that God is dependent on certain human instrumentalities; and that he ought not to remove any one on whom his church relies as especially fitted for usefulness.

But why should he be subjected to such a death? Does it not seem that not even the best of men can rely

on the Divine protection—and tend to corroborate the skeptical inference drawn from the fact that “one event happeneth to all”? No; the Christian himself, though delivered from the fear of death, can be exempt from none of its physical attendants. He may lie down never to rise again, or go out never to return; die easily or die in agony—in his bed or by the hand of violence.

Nor are we at liberty even to say that such an event is mysterious. It is less mysterious, when all the circumstances are taken into view, than that Stephen should have been also stoned to death; still less so, than that God’s own Son when intent on the great work of enlightening men in the knowledge of the truth, should have been crucified and slain by wicked hands. We may not say that his bloody death was prefigured by that of Zechariah; but, as it was predetermined, so was the prophet’s death, and for purposes not the less wise and beneficent because they are not easily resolved. In the order of God’s providence and grace, the one event might have been no less necessary than the other; and in either case, the demonstration was complete that God’s enemies were without excuse.

It is, indeed, fearful to contemplate such an event; but it is in accordance with God’s dispensations toward his people. It is one of the laws of the kingdom of heaven, that no man shall “count his life dear unto himself;” and that he who goes forth amid the ranks of a rebellious world, bearing the law of his God, shall go with his life in his hand, to surrender it under any circumstances, and at any moment, as High Heaven

may please. "Neither count I my life dear unto myself," said the great apostle to the Gentiles, "so that I may finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Still less are we justified in regarding such events as furnishing additional evidence of mistaken plans, and visionary notions, and palpable indiscretion. If any evidence, it is too much: it reflects on the wisdom and faith of such men as Zechariah, and Stephen, and Paul; it paralyzes Christian duty, quenches the fire of a heaven-born zeal, and undermines the Divine authority of the Scriptures.

But however difficult it may be to reconcile such events with our preconceptions of the Divine administration, of this we may be assured: God is righteous in all his ways, nor will he suffer the wicked to triumph over any one of his servants with impunity. "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge," said the dying Stephen; but no such prayer escaped the lips of the dying prophet. Zechariah's murderers had not sinned ignorantly in unbelief. Apostates from the God in whose service they had willingly enlisted—whom but yesterday they swore to obey and honor—they were conscious of their wickedness, and only the more exasperated when reminded of the claims of that law to which the prophet so solemnly referred. Their act was virtually a deliberate blow at the existence of Jehovah himself; and therefore all that Zechariah said, as he gave up the ghost, was said, not in imprecation, but prophetically: "The Lord look upon it, and require it!"

Had Joash been told that, as soon as Jehoiada should be laid in the grave, he himself would relapse into idolatry, he would probably have been fired with all the indignation that Hazael expressed when Elisha told him of the evils he would bring on the children of Israel: and *now* the blood of Zechariah cries against him—of that man whom he was doubly bound to protect and encourage, and to whose father he owed both his crown and his life. Zechariah, the worthy son of the good Jehoiada, stoned to death, and in the court of the Lord's house, by the order of Joash! "Be astonished, O heavens, at this, and tremble, O earth!" No wonder the Jews looked on that act as embodying the seven deadly sins. Monstrous deed! which gave forth such fearful signs of perfidy, and ingratitude, and inhumanity, and profanation, and idolatry! It were doing violence to all the sentiments of our moral being to suppose that it could go unpunished: nor was it forgotten before God. It was visited on Joash and others; visited on God's enemies from generation to generation: "for on them came all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias," even the last of the prophets slain by the Jews.

Defeat, disgrace, and death, followed hard on the ingratitude and apostasy of Joash. Though he had, by giving Hazael all the sacred treasures, induced him to stay hostilities, yet the Syrians afterward made a descent on his borders, defeated his troops, entered Jerusalem, and slew the princes of Judah; and shortly after, his own servants revolted against him, and revenged the

disgrace of the nation on the person of their king, by murdering Joash in his bed.

As we look back on the reign of Joash, several things arrest our attention : the ardent zeal and energetic reforms of the youthful king ; the noble character and honored death of Jehoiada ; the subsequent apostasy of Joash ; his murder of a holy man, and his own awful death—all serving to form a miniature picture of the world as it is : the few actuated by principle, and the many alike devoid of the fear of God ; the seeming good, and the truly religious ; profession without principle ending in ruinous error ; religious education perverted by evil communications ; the good taken away, and the evil living on ; the good, too, persecuted by the evil, and the evil finally bringing ruin upon themselves—the patience and meekness of the former, the audacity and malice of the latter ; the good one man may effect, and the good one sinner may destroy ; the consequences of infidelity being leagued with power, and the recklessness and ruthlessness of a mob.

But as we descend from a general survey to a particular investigation of the principles of human action, it becomes evident that men may build temples, yet not be temples ; be ecclesiologists, yet not Christians ; seem all devotedness to the cause of religion, yet be destitute of the grace of God ; have only a form of godliness, and yet outstrip in their zeal and efforts for “repairing the breaches in the temple,” and reforming society, those who possess the power !

Men of this class usually propose to themselves some model of action, derived from association with a remark-

able character, or, it may be, from religious biography. Their fancy has been captivated, and given rise to an ambitious motive ; and thus they are unconsciously led to assume appearances, and essay great things. But their zeal lasts only while their *Jehoiada* lives, or their associations continue. Away from their paragon, or deprived of their wonted ecclesiastical excitements, they are no longer what they seemed to be.

It may be very convenient, as it is quite common, to hang our faith on some one man ; to let him think for us, and pray for us, and act for us, or incite and encourage us to act—to make him at once our oracle and rule ; but when he dies, where will be our religion ? or should he, at an unexpected hour, swerve from the truth, where will be our faith ?

Ah ! how little criteria do external ordinances furnish of true religious character ! how impossible to form a judgment of one's future course from his present zeal and fidelity ! It is folly in the extreme to begin a religious life without fixed principles. We talk of inconsistencies, and backslidings, and apostasies, as if such things were of course, though matters of grief and shame. But they may all be traced to some radical defect in early religious character. On the other hand, we are wont to express surprise that men should so greatly differ in their views on the subject of religion, and sometimes espouse the very sentiments they once repudiated. But it is all owing to the fact that their early views and sentiments were not the result of scriptural meditation and solitary prayer : they were derived from without—and from without, in some other direction, has come a

change over the spirit of their thoughts, which could never have taken place had they from the first, with an humble, teachable disposition, referred their faith and practice to “the law and to the testimony.”

To believe because others believe, is not faith ; to be influenced by others to act, is not to act from principle ; to neglect the law and the gospel, is to be in a position to embrace error or to commit crime, as circumstances may direct and tempt. Nevertheless, he who strays from the path of truth and duty, despite of the combined influences of good instructions and a good example, necessarily aggravates his own condemnation.

But what a calamity when a good man dies ! Will his people, or will his children—those who hung on his lips, or aimed to do his pleasure—follow in his steps ? Yet shall his influence not be altogether lost. A Zechariah will remember him, though a Joash should forget him : and though the son should not live to number as many days—though he should be subjected to great trials, and at last to a violent death—his memory shall not perish, nor his burial-place be dishonored. There will be consolation in his death. His blood will cry for vengeance, as the *souls under the altar* are now crying ; while a martyr’s crown will bind his temples !

Tell me not that there is no difference in men, and no reality in religion : the flatteries of the world may seduce a Joash, but not even the terrors of the stake can shake the faith of a Zechariah !

THE LEPER'S EXTREMITY.

THE account of Naaman's cure is not less remarkable for the important lessons it teaches, than the various incidents it embodies. If it must be read with interest, it cannot be studied without profit. Perhaps no portion of sacred history, within the same compass, reflects so much light on the character and condition of fallen man, and on God's method of saving sinners.*

There was one who, though invested with affluence and clad with honor, standing high in the state, and first in the confidence of his king, nevertheless was weighed down by the most loathsome disease. He was captain of the host—a great man with his master; he was also a mighty man in valor; but—what a set-off to all his glory—he was *a leper!*

Who can envy his greatness? who would exchange conditions with him? Naaman himself is most unhappy: he would give up all his riches and honors for even the skin of the basest slave! All those appendages of rank—those insignia of power, which flare on the sight of the giddy populace—are nothing to him: the great man, the mighty man, is *a poor leper!*

As it was then, so is it now: no man's worldly greatness can exempt him from trials. Whatever his station

* 2 Kings v. 1–19.

or influence, however imposing the advantages which riches and power have secured to him—leading many a dazzled eye among the throng to covet his possessions and honors—there is some worm preying at the root of his enjoyment; and on some account that seemingly favored mortal would exchange conditions with the poorest and most obscure. He may be rich, *but* he is without health; may have acquired a great name, but his own son has disgraced that name; may have all the advantages of family and connections, but there is no harmony; may have achieved great things for his country, but he begins to feel the instability of popular favor. Shall I adduce another instance?—he may have gained the world; but—he has *lost his soul!*

So true is it, that no man should be dissatisfied with his own condition, because his neighbor's may seem to be more eligible; above all, that no one who has a good hope through grace, be his temporal condition ever so depressed, should envy the advantages of the richest worldling.

There was one who could at once control the councils of a king, and the movements of an army; yet he could not control his own spirit. He could command attendants, luxuries, and skill; yet could not gratify the most earnest wish of his heart! No one around him can aid him in the least: the leprosy still clings to him, and he is miserable.

What is man without the grace of God? Of what avail are all his efforts, unless God have mercy on him? “Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city;” and mightier is he who puts his trust in God

than he who commands the resources of an empire. Without God, the most powerful can do no more than the weakest—the richest than the poorest: the beggar is on a level with the prince—the slave with the victor.

There was one to whom a host looked up, and did obeisance; whose favors none, it may be, were too proud to solicit: yet Naaman, great and honorable as he is, must stoop to receive a favor from a mere child—a poor, friendless, captive Israelite! She has laid him under greater obligations than all the physicians of Syria; she has given him intelligence, in comparison with which all his possessions and honors are nothing worth!

So true is it, that they from whom we expect the most, often do the least for us in case of our need; that comparative strangers are often of more service to us than those on whom we naturally rely; that whatever inequality of conditions may obtain in society, there is between all ranks and classes a mutual state of dependency; that while the poor are dependent on the rich, the rich are not less dependent on the poor; that while the learned instruct the ignorant, the wisest philosopher may learn from the simple—thus teaching us to despise no one on account of the meanness of his condition, or the obscurity of his lot in life. A hint from *that poor man* may be of more value to us than the favor of princes, or the researches of science.

Though he knew not God, yet was Naaman but an instrument in the hands of Providence. “By him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria;” and had it not been for God’s so ordering events that this little Israelitish maid should not only be carried away captive

into Syria, but he employed as a servant by Naaman's wife, he had never heard of the Samaritan prophet.

Thus is it now : that same God who raised up Naaman, and afterward sent this little maid to his house, overrules all persons and events to the furtherance of his own purposes. Men may not acknowledge him ; but though they pride themselves on their means, it is he who gave them power to get wealth ; and though they may plume themselves on their success, it is he who has achieved great things by their hand ; and though they may deem themselves fortunate, it is he who communicated to them that important intelligence, or secured to them that unexpected but timely assistance : and the time will come when, if they do not acknowledge him, to adore his unmerited goodness, they will tremble before his justice ! God is all and in all !—no one acts without him ; nothing happens without his ordering or permission ; and it is the part of Christian philosophy, as well as of humble piety, to acknowledge, with either thankfulness or submission, his hand in every event.

Notwithstanding Naaman's superiority—though he stands so high as a man of valor and wisdom, the chief of the army, and prime-minister of state—yet his servants know him better than he knows himself ! How many similar instances of self-ignorance may be met with at the present day ! how rarely do we meet with one who *knows himself*, especially if he be placed in a situation that ministers to his pride and vanity ; and how often does it happen, that while one is flattering himself in his own eyes, any bystander may detect the

ruling passion of his heart—the motives, the principles which, it may be unconsciously to himself, govern all his actions! As nothing is harder than to know one's self, so nothing is easier or more common than to deceive one's self. There is no man who has not need to pray, with David—"Cleanse thou me from *secret sins*!"

"Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?"—"So Naaman turned, and went away in a rage." So did the Jews, having expected in their Messiah a temporal prince and deliverer, turn away from Christ: so did the Greeks, through the pride of their superior wisdom, turn away in contempt from the doctrine which Paul preached: and thus does many a man now turn away from the message of the gospel—displeased with its authoritative plainness; dissatisfied with its requisitions; seeing no necessity for its humbling conditions—preferring the conclusions of his own understanding, and the efficacy of his own works. 'Why should I believe in Christ?—do I not believe in God? Why must I deny myself, and follow Jesus?—is not morality sufficient? Why must I be changed by the Spirit of God?—are not my motives unimpeachable, and my character is it not without reproach?'

To desire the end without the means is characteristic of human nature. It was this desire that in ancient times secured to the astrologer and the alchemist so great an influence over the common mind: the one professing to impart foresight without the trouble of reflection; and the other riches without either economy or

toil. This animates the speculator in stocks, and supports the vender of lottery-tickets, or of empirical nostrums, while it secures success to jugglery and chicanery. Men would gain their point without regard to justice ; become rich without labor ; or be cured without medicine. Not less obvious is the same feature of our nature when the mind is awakened to the subject of religion. Who would not lay hold on eternal life ? But where is the man who has not detected in his consciousness a *reluctance* to comply with the conditions of the gospel ? As Naaman would have given to the prophet any sum of gold, or repeatedly washed in his own rivers—so would sinful men do any thing rather than bow their wills and sacrifice their lusts, by acceding to the gospel terms of salvation. They will give money, count beads, observe fasts and festivals, or even perform occasionally severe penances ; but to repent in dust and ashes—to sue for mercy at the hands of a sovereign and great God—to hope only on the ground of Christ's atoning death,—this strips the sinner of his pride, and lays his loftiness in the dust.

Here, then, is the secret of that facility with which priestcraft replenishes its treasury, and of that success which too often attends the teaching of any form of false doctrine. If some system of belief must be embraced, or form of religion observed, *that* is naturally preferable which, while it serves as an opiate to conscience, tends to minister to the pride and lusts of the carnal heart. Here is the secret, not only of Deism, Socinianism, and Universalism, but of the *influence* of Ritualism : “ I thought, He will surely come out, and stand, and strike his hand

over the place, and recover the leper." Man, though a fallen being, loves to be complimented ; and, though he would be saved, loves to be relieved from all toil and trouble. Sprinkle him with "holy water" you may, and at last administer "extreme unction ;" but tell him not that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord !" Or assure him that "apostolic baptism" will effect his regeneration ; that to receive the "consecrated elements" from ghostly hands will effectually prepare him for the kingdom of glory—and he is at once relieved from the task of "working out his own salvation with fear and trembling"—in prayerful dependence on the grace of God : his sense of personal responsibility to the bar of Almighty God is impaired, if not extinguished.

But however we may be imposed on by false teachers, or even deceive ourselves—if any are to be saved, their pride must be humbled. Naaman had never been cured, had he not done just what the prophet told him to do, and believed just what the prophet said. What a change has come over this man, who but yesterday was so enraged because Elisha did not come out to him with a great deal of ceremony, and cure him with much ado and parade—he who was not to be treated as a common man ; he who was not to be commanded ; who would in no respect compromise his dignity ; who must be humored as well as healed ! Lo ! he feels rebuked by a word from his servants : he listens to their modest suggestions ; and now, we see him wending his solitary way to the once-despised Jordan. He feels that his case is desperate, and is willing to take the prophet at his word. Thus did God humble him, and convince

him that in the sight of Israel's God all men are on a level.

It matters not what may be one's station or professions : he may be a great man in the estimation of the world, renowned for his prowess or his intellect, his attainments or his virtues ; but if he is ever saved, he will have to take his proper place in the dust before God. The leprosy of his soul can be cured but in the same way others have been cured, not excepting the vicious and degraded—and that is, by the blood of Christ. There is salvation for man through no other name ; nor through this, unless we believe what he says, and do what he requires. Every man, then, *has* something to do in order to his salvation ; and this is, not to follow the dictates of his understanding nor the devices of his heart—not what he presumes to be necessary, or infers from his assumed premises,—but simply what God has said. Naaman might have washed in the rivers of Damascus, and fancied that his health was improved by bathing in his native streams ; but he would not have been cured, had he not washed himself in the Jordan : not that its waters were in any way more salutary than Abana and Pharpar ; but that the prophet's direction to him was designed as a trial of his obedience, and as the sign of a cure. So may one's conscience be relieved by adopting some religious system which suits his notions, or accords with his inclinations ; but he cannot have “peace and joy in believing.” He may fancy himself rich and increased in goods ; but he is blind, and naked, and miserable, and in want of all things. He may hope to be saved ; but Christ himself

has said: "Not every one that saith to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that *doeth the will* of my Father who is in heaven."

How important, when sinners are solicitous of their soul's welfare, that they should be directed aright! One word from Naaman's servants that accorded with his exasperated feelings against the prophet, or with his wish to be cured in his own way, and he had died a leper—died, too, without the knowledge of Israel's God! One injudicious remark, one erroneous word, to that soul which has been directed unto the way of regeneration, and its feelings may settle down into embittered prejudice, not only against the true servant of Christ, but against the truth as it is in Jesus!

I tremble for the soul, when once the *truth of God* cuts across the path of its depraved inclinations. How imminent its danger, if it listen to the promptings of pride, or to the suggestions of an evil heart of unbelief! He who acts on any direction which has not a "*Thus saith the Lord*," does so at the peril of his soul!

"God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways:" God's *plan of salvation* is not by ghostly absolution and efficacious sacraments; not by moral observances; nor by ritual solemnities and bodily penances.

What a mockery of the truth—what an insult to Christ—what an impious reflection on his atoning sacrifice—are the dogmas and devices of those who would be "wise above what is written!" Is the gospel so imperfect and obscure, that it needs to be completed and illustrated by the expedients of worldly wisdom, and by

the traditions of men? Then is it *not* an infallible and all-sufficient rule of faith and practice. We are without a guide in this moral wilderness. Woe and alas! our hopes are dashed—we still grope amid the darkness of nature!

“To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”—“Go,” said the prophet, “wash, and be clean.” What can be plainer or more explicit? But not less explicit is God’s direction now to every inquiring sinner: “Repent, and do works meet for repentance. Believe with the heart unto righteousness.”—‘What shall I do to be saved?’ cried the trembling jailer. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.” The same is imperative and incumbent on every man: not that his repentance will save him, nor his faith; but these are the conditions on which God will save him.

Hence, the eternal condition of sinners rests with God. “Am *I* God,” said the king of Israel, on reading the letter in Naaman’s behalf, “to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy?” The king could not have restored him, nor could Elisha, nor was there any sanative virtue in the waters of the Jordan. All that Naaman can do is to follow the prophet’s instructions: whether he is to be cured or not depends on the good pleasure of the Almighty. And thus is it with the sinner: no matter what may be his views of the nature and seat of his spiritual malady; he may change his habits of life, correct his irregularities, and moderate his passions;

retire from the temptations of the world, lacerate his body, or perform divers painful tasks in atonement for sin ; but his disease has only taken deeper root. Like a cutaneous eruption when repelled, though it may conceal its outward appearance, it seldom fails to establish more firmly its internal strength—to protract and enhance the danger of the disorder. No matter to whom he applies, or what means he employs, his case baffles the power of human reason, and mocks the expedients of ghostly craft. He cannot cure himself ; no man can cure him ; and Nature, amid all her beneficent adaptations, furnishes no remedy for the leprosy of the soul. Woe be to him who, undertaking the sinner's case, does but “ skin and film the ulcerous place ;” though worse for the sinner himself, if his apprehensions be quieted by the delusions of a false hope ! He can but aggravate his own disease, and enhance the danger of his case—no matter what philosophy may suggest or priestcraft prescribe, so long as he does not reverently and solicitously inquire at the oracle of God.

Well for Naaman that there was a prophet in Samaria ; and happy for the sinner that he can now have access to some ambassador for Christ. But what can he do—even he whom God has commissioned to preach the gospel to dying sinners ?—no more than Elisha did for Naaman : “ Go wash and be clean.” And so may he say, and does say, on the authority of the inspired record, “ *Repent, and believe.*” But whether any one is to be saved, rests with God—that Being against whose law, against whose gospel, against whose providences, against whose grace, we have so long and so

deeply sinned ; whose high attributes could not be impeached—whom all holy beings would still love and adore—should he leave every soul of man to perish.

If the soul is ever cleansed from its deadly pollutions, it will be by the effectual application of the blood of Christ in the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost ; and the only ground on which any ambassador for Christ can look on the sinner's condition with the least feeling of hopefulness, will arise from his disposition to do what God requires. It matters not what else he may do, what "great things," what "wonderful works," there is no scriptural hope for him—no possibility of his recovery from ruin, so long as he does not "repent and believe." With all his moralities and charities, though he may be very decided in his religious opinions and ecclesiastical affinities, and enjoy the reputation of serving his God after the manner of his fathers, he is still in his sins, and in danger of dying in his sins.

"Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean," said the poor leper, who, in his extremity, had been forced to cast himself at the feet of Jesus ; and he was cleansed. So immediate and complete was his recovery, that, in the fulness of his heart, he could not refrain from proclaiming the wonderful name of Jesus ! Thus Naaman, obedient to the heavenly message, went and washed, and "his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. And he returned to the man of God, and said, Behold, now *I know* that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel."

That God's name might be exalted among the hea-

then was one of the ends for which the Israelites were selected as his people, and separated from the surrounding nations ; and the miraculous manner in which his authority was often attested, sometimes extorted a tribute of praise to his name even from the worshippers of idols. Thus, are God's people now spiritually distinguished from the world, that the "Son may be honored even as the Father," and often does he show forth his power and grace as a Saviour mighty to save, in a way which confounds, though it may not always convince, the unbeliever. Who must not have acknowledged the hand of God in Naaman's cure ? And who can refrain from acknowledging the grace of God, through Jesus Christ, in the conversion of sinners ? What, short of a Divine agency, can bow man's stubborn will, and change his alienated heart, and raise his earth-born affections, and inspire him with a purifying hope ? To see a man so lately deformed and degraded by sin, now, gifted with new views of God, of himself, and of the world ; having, too, new loves and hates, new joys and sorrows, new hopes and fears, new desires and purposes—being, in fact, a *new creature in Christ Jesus !* what evidence can be so conclusive that the gospel is the wisdom and the power of God unto salvation ! Be it so, that the wise, and the mighty, and the noble of this world, may regard the pure and simple gospel of Christ unworthy of their notice : as God effected Naaman's cure and conversion by means of that very river which he scorned, so does he now accomplish his gracious purposes only by means which the carnal mind invariably undervalues and despises. He

“hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise ; and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty ; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are : that no flesh should glory in his presence.”

Men may think that they have attained unto the knowledge of the true God ; but unless they have sought him as he is revealed in the *face of Jesus Christ*, whatever their boasted superiority of intellectual culture, they are in darkness not less fatal than that in which the worshipper of Rimmon was immersed, before his journey to the prophet of Israel. Their God may not have assumed an outward form ; but he is not less the idol of their fancy. The idea of him may be given to them in “the reason,” or it may spring from a morbid sentimentalism ; or it may be

“ A sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air ;”

but he is *not* that God who “has set forth Jesus Christ to be a propitiation for sin through faith in his blood.” As God was made known only to Israel, so is he now made known only to those to whom Christ reveals him. This must be admitted, or the Bible is practically rejected. In vain might Elisha have reasoned with Naaman on the sin and folly of his idolatry. A man who, notwithstanding the extremity of his disease, could hardly be prevailed on to submit to a remedial process which the pride of rank and the prejudices

of country had led him to despise, was not to be convinced that the God whom he had worshipped from his youth, and whom his king and country adored, is no God. And what was it that impelled him at last to try the waters of Jordan, but his resistless, overpowering conviction that unless the prophet could help in that way, there was no help ! He was a dying leper, and there was but one hope left for him. And what led him to return to the prophet, and in the presence of that holy man, to renounce his idols, and dedicate himself to God, and swear that "henceforth he would offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods," but his wonderful experience of the power and grace of Israel's God. This will not be denied ; yet is it equally certain—and the experience of all true Christians bears witness to the fact—that, not until a man has been brought to see "the exceeding sinfulness of sin," to feel his guilt and his danger as a sinner against God, will he flee for refuge to the hope that is set before him in the gospel ; and that when he is thus brought from nature's darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel, the conviction of his heart is, there is no God in all the earth save *in Christ* !—no pardon, no purity, no peace, no hope, no salvation, for the sinner, but in and through Christ. He needs not now any arguments to convince him of the truth of Christianity, but, simply, language to express his convictions. All documentary proofs of the gospel were superfluous ; he has the witness in himself—in his own experience ; for "God hath shined into his heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of himself in the face of Jesus Christ."

Hence the wonder of every truly converted man that he should have been so reluctant to go to Christ ; so pertinacious in his refusal of offered mercy ; so presumptuous in his views of God ; and so foolishly intent on some merely conscience-quieting mode of saving himself ! Hence his pity for those who are still strangers to the grace of God, and unwilling to accept the terms of God's salvation ; his aversion to every wretched and ruinous substitute for the glorious gospel of the grace of God ; his unreserved and conscientious devotion to the honor of the "only name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

This, indeed, is one of the earliest and most conclusive evidences of having been brought to the saving knowledge of God—a disposition to honor him in the way of his appointment, and by an observance of his ordinances. Hence, Naaman asked permission to carry back with him to his own country two mules' burden of earth from the land of Israel, that he might raise with it in Syria an altar to Jehovah. What a revolution must have taken place in his views and feelings before he could have thought of transporting a little earth to that country of which he had been so proud ; much less deigned to ask such a boon ! But it is not greater than the change which every one undergoes who becomes a Christian. There is no miracle so great as that of a sinner's conversion to the faith of the gospel !

Hence, also, Naaman asked pardon, if at any time he should bow himself in the house of Rimmon. Strange that the import of this request should have been so perverted—as though the Syrian convert who had just

avouched Jehovah to be his God, and declared his fixed and solemn purpose to worship Jehovah alone, could immediately after solicit leave to worship an idol! or as though the prophet who had been so unceremonious and decided with the leper, could now, through fear of giving offence to the nobleman, grant him permission to dishonor the Most High! The request, in fact, was not less indicative of Naaman's conscientiousness, than the reply to it of Elisha's sound judgment. As the office which the Syrian held in his own country required that he should attend the king when he frequented the temple of Rimmon, he could not avoid bending forward when the *king leaned upon him*; and therefore he inquired whether, under the circumstances, such an act, in reality an act of accommodation to his master, could be construed into a participation of the crime of idolatry. The fact of his having made such an inquiry, proves that his conscience was no longer a defiled and evil conscience; that having been truly enlightened, it had become most sensitive, and that whatever the prophet's judgment might have been, he would have deferred to it, even if it had been necessary to resign his office; and that Elisha told him to go in peace, simply meant that he might discharge the duties of his office, and yet preserve a clear conscience. He could not have said otherwise, after Naaman had declared that henceforth he would sacrifice unto none but Jehovah, unless he had wished to proselyte him to the Mosaic religion, and this he was under no legal obligation to do. On the contrary, though the Israelites were at liberty to receive proselytes with certain restrictions as to their genealogy,

provided they offered themselves in sincerity — yet from the first they were kept as much as possible apart from the rest of mankind, in order that the line of the Messiah's descent might be well defined, and God's dealings with mankind liable to no misconstruction. The prophet's reply shows that he was neither unacquainted with the great object of the Mosaic polity, nor influenced by any bigoted and sectarian views. There was hope for the Syrian, though he returned to his own country ; and he might there hold and exemplify his faith in the true God, even though he did not conform to the ceremonial enactments of Moses. He might continue to serve his king, yet be true to God ; might discharge the several offices which his station imposed on him, yet connive at neither idolatry nor hypocrisy. By attending the king, he would not shock his prejudices, nor incur his displeasure ; and thus might be made the instrument of ultimately leading *him* to sacrifice with himself at the altar of Jehovah. In short, the commission of idolatry could not have occurred to either Naaman or Elisha ; otherwise the former would have convicted himself of insincerity in declaring his faith in God, and the latter of faithlessness to his solemn trust. The fact that Naaman was not without his apprehensions that it might not be lawful, under any circumstances, to adopt a posture similar to that which the king employed as a sign of reverence to his idol, bespoke the great moral change which he had experienced, and the true state of his mind toward God and duty. It cannot, therefore, be used as a precedent, much less furnish an apology, for sinful connivances.

What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? What agreement hath God with idols, or what concord hath Christ with Belial? Such are the questions which Christianity proposes to every one who has been brought to the knowledge and belief of Him who “was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners;” and who died to redeem and to “purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works.” Under the superior light of the Christian dispensation, “whatsoever is not of faith”—performed without a full persuasion of its lawfulness—“is sin;” and even what is “lawful” may not always be “expedient.” Hence, the Christian convert, aware of the deceitfulness of sin, scrutinizes his motives, as well as guards his actions; and since our judgment is liable to be warped by custom and interest—by a desire to please men, or even to gratify self under the plea of serving God—aims to weigh every question in relation to truth and duty in the balance of the sanctuary. Unless he “adorns the doctrine of God his Saviour in all things,” and herein exercises himself that he may “always have a conscience void of offence,” his acknowledgment of Christ as Lord has no connection with “a new heart and a right spirit.” Man may call him “Lord, Lord,” and bow the head to no other name; but unless he desires to know and do the will of God—hates sin, and fears to sin, and aims to purify himself even as Christ is pure—he is without the primary and essential evidence of being a new creature in Christ Jesus. He whose soul has been cleansed from the guilt of sin, will watch and pray that he may be delivered from its power.

THE UNPRINCIPLED SERVANT.

It is singular, that, while Naaman's servants appear to have been good, Elisha's servant should, notwithstanding his superior advantages for knowing and doing what is right, have been devoid of generous sympathy and moral principle : yet it is not so remarkable as that Josiah should have had such a son as Jehoiakim, or Christ a Judas among his disciples. But even such instances find their parallels at the present day. We cannot prejudge with accuracy as to one's character and course through life, from the instruction which he receives, or the example he enjoys. We know, from observation, that while the son of an infidel may become religious, the son of a Christian may be skeptical ; that while a Romanist may be a good servant, a protestant may be a bad one ; that a heathen will be true to his word, when a man of superior moral illumination will betray his trust.

It does not follow, however, that one religious system is as good as another ; that examples exert no influence ; or that natural conscience and common sense—as David Hume was wont to insinuate—constitute a better security against vice and crime than the restraints which religion imposes. It proves rather that a little light is far better than the greatest advantages when neglected ; that

men may be good, notwithstanding a defective education and imperfect example—and bad, though the influence of both precept and example may have been brought to bear on their minds; that he who breaks through the restraints of a virtuous education, or withstands the motives which a knowledge of Divine truth presents, must necessarily be worse than he who has been brought up under the influence of worldly morality, and in all things aims to secure success in life.

It might be supposed that Gehazi would have respected his master's disinterestedness:* such instances of gratuitous service must have been then, as they are now, singularly rare; while they seldom fail to elicit general applause. No act wins to itself such hearty approbation as an act of disinterested benevolence; yet none is so seldom imitated. In the estimation of Gehazi, the prophet was doubtless a very good man; but then he was a weak man, if not a fool: 'He needs not have demanded a fee before giving his counsel, but he should not have rejected a fair expression of Naaman's gratitude. It was uncourteous; and, besides, it was as easy for one in Naaman's circumstances to part with a few talents as to express his thanks.'

Such are the thoughts which often serve to restore selfishness to the complacent consciousness of its own superior wisdom, when it has been constrained to render a tribute to benevolence; such the not unfrequent judgment of the world in relation to Christian self-denial. To forego temporal advantages for the sake of adherence to moral principle; to refuse a pecuniary compen

* 2 Kings v. 20-27.

sation when so great a benefit has been conferred ; or be generous toward those who are abundantly able to recompense a meritorious service—is, in the view of many, an indication, if not of imbecile sensitiveness, at least of ruinous improvidence. To act with a reference to duty, having an eye single to God's glory and man's good, is what minds of a certain class do not understand—with which they have no sympathy—though they may laud benevolence, and *despise* selfishness ! So reluctant to condemn itself, and so deceitful, is the human heart.

Yet may any one ascertain his own ruling passion, who will but candidly ask himself how *he* would have acted under the circumstances in which another was placed. It is in this way—by proposing a suppositive case—that guilt has often been detected ; and the reason is, that however easy it may be to refrain from the actual commission of wrong, or to deny a charge, it is not possible to preclude the suggestions of either covetousness, ambition, or sensuality. From the recesses of one's reflective solitude, nature will speak. The world knows not what is going on *there* ; but the man himself cannot be deaf to the language of his own voiceless thoughts, nor insensible to the promptings of his own selfish desires. *He* would have taken the gift ; he would have seized that opportunity of filling his coffers—of establishing his fame—of gratifying his lust of pleasure, or his pride of revenge. In the mirror of his own heart he sees himself to be actuated by passions which, if known to others, would stamp his character with the

brand of *selfishness*—be it the ruling love of money, of fame, or of sensual indulgence.

It might be thought, moreover, that Gehazi would at least have had such respect for his master's honor as not to shake that high opinion of the prophet's goodness with which Naaman had departed. By soliciting the talents, he might not only place his master seemingly in an equivocal attitude, but give occasion for Naaman to doubt whether the religion of an Israelite was, in fact, purer than that of a Syrian—thus tending to seduce him from the worship which he had so recently embraced. But what was all this to one whose heart was set on gain? And what is the honor of religion, or the welfare of souls, to one who has surrendered his heart to mammon? Even now there may be found those who care not how much they impede the cause of Christ, or what reproach they bring on his name, so long as they can subserve their mercenary purposes.

This servant, under the plea of providing for two young men of the sons of the prophets, could serve himself—having no concern for them, except so far as an allusion to their circumstances might elicit sympathy, and secure the coveted treasure. This is one of the expedients to which covetousness not unfrequently resorts to accomplish its ends. What are pious frauds—all pathetic appeals to fictitious cases of poverty and distress, of widowhood and woe, either to raise money or to lower just demands—all violations of truth, either that the sympathies of the benevolent may be enlisted, or that good may result to others—but so many instances of the fraud which Gehazi practised on Naaman?

His sphere of observation must be very circumscribed who knows not that covetousness often gratifies itself under the plea of doing good ; or seeks its own, while professing to give to others an opportunity of ministering to the wants of the deserving, or of contributing to some worthy object.

At a time when Gehazi should have been especially true to the interests of the prophet—when the gracious miracle which had been wrought should have led him, not only to respect his master, but to fear and worship God, and to do all in his power to influence the servants of Naaman to espouse the same faith with their master,—he had but one thought, one desire, and that was—*money !*

But all times are alike to the covetous—times of trial as well as of prosperity ; times of revival, as well as of declension, in religion ; and the Sabbath, as if it were a secular day ! When men should be mourning over their sins, or embracing their opportunities of doing good ; when they cannot be blind to the wonders God has wrought in turning sinners from the error of their ways ; and when it behooves them to be most circumspect and prayerful—then are they intent on their selfish gains ! Amid all scenes, whether of mercy or of judgment, all they think of, or care for, is their pecuniary interests ! It is no time to get gain, when we cannot seek it without showing an utter disregard for God's glory and man's spiritual good.

He who surrenders his heart to covetous desires, at once jeopardis his integrity. He may not intend to violate any known principle of right ; but as riches become

more an object of desire, just in that proportion will there ensue a disregard for the means which may be employed. Any selfish passion may lead to the adoption of exceptionable means, but this is the especial tendency of avarice: the mind seemingly loses sight of moral distinctions, and all regard for the rights of others, in its desire to secure its end. The power of conscience must indeed be paralyzed, before any heinous offence can be deliberately committed in order to selfish acquisition; but as avaricious desires are opposed by the principles of honesty, these principles are always liable to evasion through the deceitfulness of sin. If there be too much conscience to admit of a direct falsehood, selfishness will contrive to sanction equivocation, artifice, and deceit. Hence the sinister reserve, or tempting insinuation; the advantage often taken of ignorance, of necessity, and of prevailing humor; the exaggerated representation, or the undue depreciation: all the phases of petty cheating, and the numberless tricks of trade. No man can be supremely avaricious, and at the same time *morally upright*. Tried at the bar of a commercial exchange, he might be acquitted; but weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, he would be *found wanting*. If the desire for riches be not controlled by principle, principle will be subordinate to avarice.

It is folly, however, to commit sin in hope of secrecy. Nothing is more common than to presume on the concealment of a guilty deed. Were it not for the hope of eluding detection, even they who have no fear of God before their eyes would shrink from crime. But God has so arranged the present constitution of things, that a

man's sin will sooner or later find him out. No matter what his subterfuges—as surely as he is regardless of truth or justice, so surely will something happen to excite suspicion, and thus to destroy confidence in his character. However cautiously he may have proceeded, with whatever adroitness his dishonest plans have been executed, he has perhaps outwitted himself; or while intently on his guard, some form of remark or sudden change of countenance has served to disclose the guilty secret. Thus it is that fraud seldom escapes detection; and that he who has been guilty of a dishonest act, can never reinstate himself in public estimation, though *chicanery* may have extricated him from the grasp of the law.

It needs no prophet's eye to detect the man who has dared to violate any of the moral laws of his being. Either circumstances so conspire against him as to preclude the presumption of his innocence, or he is betrayed by his own conscience. Doubtless Elisha, in so readily penetrating the secret of his guilty servant, was aided by the Omniscient eye; and so were the apostles in the case of Ananias and Sapphira: but why have such instances of the supernatural detection of guilt been recorded, if not to convince us that, though there are no inspired men now, the God of the prophets and apostles still lives and reigns—the Supreme moral governor of the universe!—taking cognizance of every soul of man; noting their every thought, and purpose, and act, whether known and punishable in this world or not? Yes; go where we may—do what we may—we cannot go *where God is not*, nor do *what God sees not*.

Naaman had no knowledge of Gehazi's character, but the prophet knew him better than he knew himself. With what surprising accuracy did he penetrate his designs! What did this man care for the sons of the prophets? what to him was the cause of truth, or the honor of God? Long had he coveted money for selfish purposes; and now he is felicitating himself on having procured the means of his release from all menial services. A few days more, and *he* will be looked up to as the proprietor of vineyards and flocks! Instead of any longer serving, he himself will be waited upon—the servant forgotten in the possessor of an estate!

So thought Gehazi; and thus has many a man been tempted to defraud. A growing reluctance to labor; dissatisfaction with small gains; a feverish desire to leave one's employers—to do business on one's own account, or to procure a splendid residence; to revel in luxury, and affect display: these are the feelings which have led so many astray from the paths of an honest livelihood. In feelings such as these we may detect the cause of almost every act of fraud among youth who have been necessitated to labor for subsistence.

But covetousness defeats its own end. To gain at the expense of truth and honesty, is to sacrifice all that renders life desirable: it is to blight one's prospects of earthly good; to involve others, it may be, as well as ourselves, in disgrace and ruin! "The leprosy, therefore, of Naaman," said the prophet to Gehazi, "shall cleave unto thee and to thy seed forever!" Fearful sentence! but no sooner uttered than executed; for he went out from his presence *a leper as white as snow*.

Appalling change in the aspect of one who but a few hours since glowed with health, and bounded over the plain in eager pursuit of the departed Syrian! — but not so great as the change that has come over his spirit. What now does he think of the talents of gold procured at the expense of infamy and disease? What has he done? What is he, and his children too — his children's children! Who can describe the anguish of his spirit? How cheerfully would he surrender his ill-gotten gains; how readily link his lot with poverty and servitude forever, could he only be recovered from that dreadful malady!

Is his folly so palpable and pitiable? Does any one think that he would not — no, not for the riches of Cræsus — have exposed himself to the possibility of so fearful a punishment? Let him beware, then, how he envies the prosperity of the foolish! — lest, tempted by the prospect of securing the means of luxurious living for himself and his children, he be led to deviate from the principles of right.

Far from being an idle story, this case of the prophet's unprincipled servant is fraught with the most *solemn lessons* — lessons which, if unheeded, may be to the worldling a source of endless regret. Simple as this narrative seems, it meets its illustration from day to day. “‘There is no peace,’ saith God, ‘to the wicked;’” and it requires no uncommon powers of observation to perceive that God has so ordered events as to preclude all gratification from unlawful acquisitions: “‘The way of the wicked shall not prosper.’”

Many a man who aimed by unjust gains to enrich

himself, has thereby both disgraced and ruined himself; who anticipated great possessions, has forfeited even the means of a common livelihood; who pictured to himself houses and lands, has by one false step found himself immured in a dungeon! Go to that mansion which was built in unrighteousness; and tell us if, amid all its splendor and luxury, you can descry any token of happiness. Look at the children of that man who enriched himself by unlawful means for their sake, and say if their father's property has not proved to them a curse. Or, enter into that dismal prison-house: there encased, as in a living tomb, we see a man expiating the crimes of his youth. Many a long day has passed since he was shut in from the scenes and intercourse of this busy, bustling world; and never again can he be where or what he was! But what would he not give to be able to retrace that *one step*? Poor man! could he only have foreseen the consequences of his fraud—foreseen? He well knew the consequences of being detected, but he hoped to escape; and now—*there* he is, and will be—not only stripped of his gains, but left a prey to the undying vultures of remorse!

This, however, is only one out of innumerable instances; and as such, they constitute *facts* in the moral government of Almighty God. Be our judgment of God what it may—we cannot form too elevated conceptions of his goodness and mercy—yet who can deny these facts, or arrest the temporal consequences of any one act of youthful crime? How often are these consequences to be recognised in the poverty, and disease, and wretchedness, of those who yielded to temptation

in the morning of their days!—and if so, there is no unfounded reason for the apprehension that the condition of the immortal may be affected by the deeds of the mortal. God may and does commiserate the sinner: nevertheless, he who violates the moral laws of his being, must suffer the penalty. To sever the connection between crime and punishment, were to change the moral constitution of the universe.

Is it inconsistent with our notions of the Divine goodness to suppose that solely in consequence of any deed done in this life, our future condition will be eternally irremediable? Then, the leprosy with which Gehazi was judicially visited constitutes a reflection on the same attribute of Deity; and not less so a thousand facts which may be gathered from the course of human events. Under certain circumstances, and before reaching a certain point, a wicked man may reform, and perhaps retrieve his affairs; but they who go on in the ways of wickedness, though the consequences of their actions be long delayed, meet at last with inevitable destruction.

Go, skeptic!—contemplate the remediless effects which the forger, the gambler, or the debauchee, has brought on himself: and as you gaze with wonder and pity, you may discern amid his rags and infamy, or in his chains and remorse, some faint image of that man's eternal condition who prostituted his powers and squandered life in the pursuit of selfish gratifications.

Or, is it said that eternal punishment is disproportionate to the sins of a short life? So might it have been thought that the transfer of Naaman's disease to

Gehazi was severer punishment than he deserved ; but, whatever might have been the thoughts of men respecting the case, the *leprosy clung to him and to his seed forever* ; nor does the record of natural punishments fail to furnish many a parallel to this remarkable case. Simply for having gratified his appetite, the drunkard is punished with the loss of health and happiness, of property and character. Through the revels of one brief night, the debauchee has brought on himself incurable disease and indelible infamy ; while the robber, though only a few dollars may have been taken from their rightful owner, is doomed by the constitution of society to imprisonment for years. Is it hard that one must forego so much for a single crime, or for some selfish gratification ? But our feelings cannot obstruct the natural course of justice ; nor can it be denied, that natural punishments are often greater than the selfish advantages or guilty pleasures from which they flow ; and even the skeptic must acknowledge, in reference to nature's God—as we reverently say of the God of the Bible—“ his thoughts are not as our thoughts, nor his ways as our ways.” Sometimes mere want of attention, inadvertence, or thoughtless neglect, is followed by the most serious consequences—consequences as fatal as may result from any flagrant violation of the laws of God ; and with this startling fact before us, who is so irrational as not to fear that eternal punishment may naturally follow even the few sins of a short life ?

Surely as Gehazi went out from the presence of the man of God “ a leper *white as snow*,” so surely shall “ the rich man *fade away* in his ways :” so surely, the

covetous man shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. Though he may not have violated the principles of truth and justice, his heart, as Gehazi's, is set on mammon. He has consequently perverted the end of his being, and come short of the glory of God ; for he has loved gold more than his Maker — worshipped gold more than Jehovah, and he must abide the issue. He did not seek first the kingdom of God. What to him were its treasures of righteousness ? He was satisfied with the world as his portion, and he can have no other. He loved the world, and he must perish with the world. Having bartered his soul for money, he can reasonably expect no mercy — he will receive none ! Let him flatter himself in his own eyes as he may, and affect to look down on those who would rather forego every thing than give up the testimony of a good conscience, or deny Christ,—though all things may seem to favor his course ; yet “ as the Lord liveth,” that man “ is reserved to the day of destruction ” — he will “ be brought forth to the day of wrath.”

Who that looked on Gehazi, covered as he was with so frightful a disease, must not have been deterred from unlawful gains — contented even in the midst of his poverty ? And where is the man who can steadily contemplate the end of the wicked, as made known to us through the sacred oracles, without being convinced, that “ contentment with godliness is great gain ! ” — and, as he himself has in all things sinned and come short of the glory of God, without being urged to flee for refuge to that blessed hope which is set before the sinner in the gospel of the grace of God.

THE SKEPTIC.

Not long after the events to which the preceding section refers, the king of Syria renewed hostilities against the king of Israel ; but his predatory incursions and repeated ambuscades were to no purpose. Jehoram was invariably forewarned of the designs of the Syrians, and as often extricated from the dangers to which he was exposed. At last they began to suspect who it was that apprised the king of Israel of their schemes to entrap him. How they heard of Elisha, we have no means of ascertaining. It is not improbable that Naaman, on his return to the court of Syria, spread his fame ; and thence they might have concluded that a man who wrought such a wonderful cure, could easily reveal the greatest secrets. Actuated perhaps by curiosity, not less than by animosity toward the prophet who had baffled their aims to seize the person of Jehoram, they accordingly determined to surprise Elisha at Dothan ; but being warned, by the Spirit of God, of their intentions, instead of falling into the hands of the Syrians, he smote them with blindness, and led them even to the gates of Samaria. With the greatest ease all might then have been put to the sword ; and had it not been for the interference of the prophet, Jehoram would have inflicted summary vengeance on his captive enemies.

They were, however, liberally supplied with food and drink, and sent back to their own country. Remarkable as was such an act of generosity, it had no effect on Benhadad but to increase his rancorous feelings, and inspire him with a renewed determination to conquer Israel. Jehoram could not cope with his formidable army. He was driven from the field, and constrained to shut himself within the walls of Samaria. For months the city was subjected to a close siege, and at last reduced to the extremity of famine. So great was the scarcity, that both avarice and natural affection yielded to the cravings of hunger. No sum was too large for the vilest morsel ; while even mothers began to prey on their offspring. An affecting instance is related : on a certain day, a mother appealed to the justice of the king, against her neighbor, on the ground that after her child had been eaten between them, her neighbor now refused to slaughter hers, though she had solemnly engaged to do so in turn !

Under such circumstances, what could be said or done ? Threatened with the sword from without, and unable to resist the ravages of famine within the walls of the city, the king, in his despair, forgot his obligations to Elisha ; and, fancying that he was the cause of all the public distress, determined to put him to death. It was indeed a preposterous supposition, but not more so than that the pagan emperors should have ascribed any calamity that befell the Roman empire to the wrath of the gods against the Christians ; that Nero should have imputed to them the conflagration of Rome ; or that men should often attempt to resolve all national

judgments into natural causes. It is now, however, as it was of old, more common to assign any reason for such occurrences than to admit the right one. Man would unjustly criminate others rather than acknowledge his own offences; condemn the good, than admit that he himself is the sinner; proceed to execute an unrighteous sentence, sooner than bemoan his own sins.

It is the order of Providence that rash judgments shall be in due time rebuked and reversed. No man ever gave an order, or took a step, under the influence of passion, which he did not afterward see cause to regret. Elisha foresaw that the king would repent of his rash order the moment he was left to his own reflections; and that he would shortly even come in person to stay the execution of his own sentence: and accordingly no sooner had the messenger of death been detained at the door of the prophet's house by the elders of Samaria, than the king arrived. But his joy on finding the prophet still alive, quickly gave place to an ebullition of passion against the prophet's God: 'Of what use to attempt to serve a Being who exposed him and his people to such distresses? Elisha might do as he pleased; but, for himself, he would no longer strive to live in obedience to God's laws.'

We are shocked by such impiety; but the sentiment which he passionately avowed is now often felt, though it may be seldom expressed. The earth-bound mind is forward to judge of the value of religion, solely from its relation to our present well-being; and losing sight of all spiritual interests, in its desire to compass worldly ends, is apt to conclude that God's service

must be alike profitless and irksome. Even they who have been brought to the "knowledge of God," are slow to realize that he has a right to do with them as seemeth unto him best ; that the present is a state of moral trial and discipline ; that their reward is not in those things which the earthly mind covets ; and that by the greatest afflictions he may only design their greater good. Thus, the ill success of a righteous man in his temporal affairs has too often given rise to the desponding sentiment, " Verily, I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency !" Thus, too, when one who has long served God is overtaken by adversity, or visited by a series of afflictions, he may detect in himself a feeling that, if embodied in language, would be equivalent to the declaration, " The Lord has dealt unjustly ; he has rewarded me evil and not good." In some instances the result of the trial proves that, notwithstanding the man's professions, and seemingly good works for years, he is devoid of true faith in God. With the continuance of his worldly difficulties, he loses his interest in religion ; and becoming estranged from God's service, gives himself to the world with desperate eagerness of aim ;—as if he would make amends for time that had been worse than wasted ; or revenge himself on those who still serve God !

As an impulsive son, when reduced to an extremity through his own indiscretions, has threatened to disgrace himself, unless his father will replenish his exhausted means of selfish gratification ; so the king might have thought, that by threatening to forsake Israel's God for the gods of Syria, the prophet would work a

miracle for his relief ; but, though nothing could have grieved that holy man more than such an act on the part of him whose life he had repeatedly preserved ; though the public distress had undoubtedly affected his own mind as deeply as the king's ; yet he could not act but as God directed, nor speak but as the Spirit dictated. Man must wait God's pleasure ; and God, in his own time, and in his own way, will vindicate the glory of his sovereign rule.

‘Be not rash, O king ! have but patience a little while, and the scarcity of which you now complain, will be converted into abundance ;’ for “thus saith the Lord, To-morrow, about this time, shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria.” Who, unless inspired of Heaven, would have made such an announcement—especially when his life was in imminent jeopardy ? What ! to-morrow ? within twenty-four hours, shall so great plenty succeed this appalling scarcity ? It did indeed seem like trifling with the king's credulity, and mocking the people's misery. We should not be surprised, if all the people, who heard the prophet speak thus, had looked upon him, if not as a cunning man whose object was to put off the king, at least as a visionary—so impossible did it seem that any relief could be extended to the city.

How the king received this assurance we are not told ; but one of the bystanders went so far as to express his skepticism in the most daring terms : “Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be ?” This was a certain lord, on

whose hand the king leaned ; but though he was high in authority, and his skeptical reply might have met a response from all who heard it, Elisha, so far from attempting to reason with him, or to explain to him the grounds on which he believed that relief would be afforded, abruptly addressed him in the ominous language of prophetic announcement : “ Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.”* Thus they parted : each one to await the issue. The one calmly confident that his prediction will be verified ; the other not the less persuaded, in his own mind, that there can be no relief for the city ; but neither able to do any thing to thwart the other.

It all rests with God—with Him in “ whose hand is the heart of kings,” and who “ doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth.” It was he who made this announcement of returning plenty to the king, by the lips of Elisha ; and shall his servant be put to shame ? Shall the wicked have occasion to triumph over a prophet of the Lord ? Man does not see how such an event can be brought about ; but God knows how to bring it to pass. With more ease than man can turn his hand, does God accomplish his purposes, whether of mercy or of vengeance. Every element yields to his control ; every creature, from an angel to an insect, is subject to his authority. He speaks, and it is done ; he commands, and it stands fast. With such a being for his enemy, what can man do, though millions call him king, and nations throng his standard ? With such a friend, what may

* 2 Kings, chap. vii.

not the feeblest, most neglected, most oppressed, among the sons of men, expect and hope for? Who can elude his grasp, or withstand his anger?—who separate us from his love, or frustrate the purposes of his grace?

Another sad day has passed over Samaria; and the night has again set in, to afford relief for a few fitful hours from the gnawings of hunger and the sights of ghastly woe. The hush of midnight is over the city: no sound heard, save here and there the low moan of famishing poverty, or the feeble utterance of a prayer for help to the God of Jacob. What if the cry of the Syrians should be borne on the wind? Who among the startled sleepers could man the walls; or would not rather fall before the enemy, than live to eke another day of want and misery? But while the Samaritans sleep on, the Syrians wake! Strange noises fill their ears—growing louder and more distinct, like the noise of chariots and the noise of horsemen—even the noise of a great host. Consternation spread from rank to rank of Benhadad's army; and, not being able to account for the noise, except on the supposition that the king of Israel had been joined by the kings of the Hittites and of the Egyptians, and were fast approaching, they resolved forthwith to raise the siege: and so precipitate was their retreat, they left behind them “their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp, as it was.”

In what way such noises were produced, or whether some sudden alarm caused them to imagine the sounds of an approaching army, we cannot decide. Who but God could have devised and effected such a plan for

the dispersion of Israel's enemies?—even that God who overwhelmed Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea; who, in one brief night, smote with death a hundred fourscore and five thousand of Sennacherib's army; who defeated Nebuchadnezzar's malice toward Daniel; and who caused over against the candlestick, on the plaster of the wall of Belshazzar's palace, the finger as of a man's hand writing! Well might David exclaim—“Thou, even thou, art to be feared!”—“There were they in great fear where no fear was;” and in like manner He can distract us with terrors, when no terrors are to be seen without. As by the breath of his nostrils he can sweep us from the earth, so can he send an invisible arrow into the soul; filling us with amazement, while others may be ministering to our pleasure; wringing our hearts with secret anguish, while others are envying us our means of happiness.

With what noiseless celerity God accomplished his purpose, may be inferred from the fact that the watchmen of Samaria had no knowledge of Benhadad's retreat. It was so ordered, however, that some lepers should be the first to communicate the unexpected intelligence. These had been thrust from the city—for the ceremonial part of the Levitical code was observed, even when the Israelites were regardless of the moral law; and having lived for several days under the walls, they at last determined to risk the sword of the Syrians rather than die of hunger. But as they approached the Syrian lines, what was their surprise to find neither sentinels nor pickets to oppose their progress! nor was there a soldier nor a camp-follower to be seen, where but at

the going down of yesterday's sun the thousands and tens of thousands of Benhadad's forces invested the city ; but, instead of the army, their tents, with all their horses and cattle, and all their treasures. The poor lepers were not backward to satisfy their appetites, nor even to appropriate to themselves some of the valuable effects, forgetting—like many a man at the present day, whose health is too precarious to admit of his ever enjoying the riches he is so intent on acquiring—that the golden vessels they were so anxious to secure could be of no manner of use to them. Strange, pitiable cupidity in persons so wretchedly diseased ! but not more so, to one who views things aright, than the cupidity of any dying sinner. “ For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul ? ”

Public calamity tests individual character. If one is supremely selfish, it will appear in his utter disregard for others ; and thus these lepers had no thought of the sufferings of their countrymen, until they had not only feasted to satiety, but secured as many golden vessels as they could with safety. Then, making a virtue of necessity, they hastened back and reported what they had seen to the sentinel on the walls, who immediately sent word to the king. How natural that the king should have been suspicious of treachery ; and that, to guard against a surprise, he should have sent out parties to reconnoitre : nor was it until he had satisfactorily ascertained that the Syrians had really left their camp, that he permitted the inhabitants to go out after the supplies. Here, then, was abundance for all Samaria ; and thus it came to pass that “ a measure of fine flour was

sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel."

But where is he who sneeringly asked, "If the Lord should make windows in heaven, might this thing be?" Does he not feel rebuked for his skepticism? does he not behold the superabundance which God has laid open to the people? Yes; but having by the king's order been stationed at the gate of the city, he was thrown down in the haste and rush of the famished people after the food, and thus trodden under foot until he died. This is repeated, and the event carefully compared with the prediction: the sacred writer, after again alluding to the occasion on which the prediction was uttered, seemingly taking pains to add, "And so it fell out unto him; for the people trod upon him in the gate, and he died."

There was an exact fulfilment; and it could not have taken place, had not the prophet been divinely inspired. In this respect it is not unworthy of comparison with some of the predictions which Christ himself uttered. The fulfilment, for example, of Christ's prediction of Peter's denial, depended on so many concurring circumstances, as to preclude all reasonable grounds for supposing that it was a mere casual suggestion.

Even on the supposition that Elisha merely ventured the assertion, he could not have foreknown that the Syrians would be frightened away by imaginary noises; nor that they, in raising the siege, would leave all their provisions behind them; much less that the nobleman would be stationed at the gate of the city, or that while there he would be overthrown by the people as they

rushed forth to pillage the deserted camp. If it were not to the last degree improbable that the Syrians would be induced at once to abandon the siege, and give up all their effects to the very people whom they had been laboring for months to reduce to such an extremity of suffering, that they would be glad to capitulate—it certainly was, that he who stood so high in authority and honor as the king's right-hand man, would be the only one out of the city who should be suddenly killed, without tasting of the abundance which he had been permitted to behold.

Men are often disappointed in their most sanguine expectations—sometimes fail when on the eve of succeeding, or die at the very moment the world is about to reward their efforts. But this man had no expectation of coming plenty—not if the heavens should open! And that he should live only to see it, without enjoying it, could have been known only by Him “who knoweth the end from the beginning:” thus proving that God both inspired the prophet and destroyed the skeptic.

There is nothing charged against this man: no breach of the ceremonial nor of the moral law; no want of fealty to the king, nor of regard for the people. He might have been an upright man in all the relations of life—a brave soldier, an able statesman, and a lover of his country; but he was an infidel. The sin which cost him his life was unbelief—the positive rejection of the truth of God's word—instigated in part by the circumstances of extreme scarcity in which he, with the inhabitants of Samaria, were placed; and more particularly from the fact that he was unable to see in what way such

a prediction could be fulfilled : thus, as it were, testing the truth of God's word by his own understanding—measuring the attributes of the great God by his own finite capacities ! This seems to us to have been no less preposterous than presumptuous. What was he, that he should have questioned God's ability to make good the prophet's word ? With quite as much propriety might he have denied the existence of a God, because he found himself unable to explain the mysteries of his own being, or the phenomena of the universe. O vain man ! what knowest thou of thyself ? How, then, canst thou hope to fathom the deep things of God ?

Perhaps he was jealous of the prophet's influence, and aimed, by questioning his word, to infect the king's mind with some suspicion of the prophet's intention to escape. Or, it may be—as he was a man of rank—that he was simply desirous of showing his entire freedom from all vulgar credulity. It is supposable, moreover, that he had not recognised the hand of Providence in the condition to which the city was reduced ; and if so, he would not have been forward to accredit any special interposition of Heaven in its behalf. It has been observed with wonder, that, in times of public calamity, there is unwonted forgetfulness of God and duty : men then grow bold in iniquity, or studiously contrive to shut out all serious thoughts ; nor will even the proclamation of a national fast induce them to join God's people in supplicating his mercy. But it will be found that such men have been without God in their thoughts. By them the calamity is referred, not to God, who “ for our sins is justly displeased,” but to some natural cause

—to the air, and it must be changed ; to the food, and there must be a substitute ; to imprudence and exposure, and these must be avoided : and relief must come by some sensible and appropriate means—perceived by human science ; not by prayer to God and hope in his mercy, from an invisible source, and in an inscrutable way !

But whatever thoughts might have passed through the nobleman's mind, we may find in our own day not a few parallel instances of skepticism. Inflated with pride, some presume to gauge God's truth by their own narrow views and private feelings. In their view, there was no necessity for a Revelation, or the doctrines of the Bible are inconsistent with the dictates of their understanding. They cannot see how God could have created the world out of nothing ; how the world was formed in six days, or how death is the consequence of sin. It seems inexplicable to them how the Word should have been made flesh ; or how Christ can unite in himself the attributes of Godhead with the properties of a man ; how he could have risen from the dead ; how it is that the dead will be raised, and how men will be hereafter judged according to their deeds done in the body. These, and many other things, embraced in the discoveries of the Bible, they cannot understand ; and therefore they reject, or modify and pervert, to suit their notions or support their theories—overlooking the fact that a Revelation necessarily implies truths which could not have been excogitated by the human mind ; nay, seemingly ignorant of God's infinite supremacy, and thus bringing down the great God to a level with his crea-

tures—resolving the infinite into the finite! as though, in comparison with the Divine perfections, man's power and wisdom could be aught else than weakness and folly!

The nobleman's skepticism not only tended to impugn the prophet's veracity, but absolutely to derogate from God's uncreated and sovereign authority. With hardly less effrontery might he have contradicted the prophet, or challenged God to do what he himself conceived to be an impossibility!

But such is virtually the treatment which God's word not unfrequently encounters from skeptics. Instead of deferring to its authoritative teachings, they are rather forward to ask, 'How can these things be?' or, instead of taking the pains to inquire, they at once prejudge and condemn. Strangers to that sobriety of thought, that modesty of judgment, and docility of spirit, which characterize the lover of truth, they are either volatile and conceited, or captious and rash. Unaccustomed to reflect on the great things pertaining to God and the soul, they are controlled by the mind of the flesh.

Had the Samaritan lord only used the faculties with which he had been endowed, he might have ascertained whether Elisha was a true prophet; or had he bethought himself for a moment, he would have concluded that nothing could be too difficult for God to do—that he who had once rained manna, might as easily send corn; but simply because he did not see *how* the city could be so speedily and abundantly supplied with food, he rejected the truth of God's word. Hence, unbelief is derogatory, not only to God's perfections, but to our own high faculties of thought. It is wronging ourselves

as well as God, to question his word, and therefore doubly criminal — frustrating at once God's benevolence, and the end of man's rational constitution.

If, therefore, it was right for God to convince this Samaritan lord of the unreasonableness of his skepticism, it was not wrong to punish him for his impious presumption and excuseless unbelief. He who would not believe the promise, did not deserve to partake of the blessing.

Man, in the hour of his extremity, is prone either to doubt God's word, or to despair of succor. We have already seen that the king was on the eve of abandoning his faith; and it may be that some of the elders were ready to respond to the expression of his feelings: but then it was that God interposed, by the voice of his servant, and bade them hope. So did God come forth to the rescue of his chosen people, at the very moment when, hedged in as they were between precipitous cliffs on the one hand, and the Egyptian garrisons on the other—with a relentless enemy behind them, and an impassable sea before them—their destruction seemed to be inevitable. God's time to help is when all human resources are exhausted. Yes, when the strength of his people is gone, then God appears, in his all-sufficiency, to succor, and to comfort, and to save. Various illustrations of this truth might be gathered from the sacred page; thereby teaching us that, whatever the condition in which we are placed by his providence, we should always wait and hope on, though hope be long delayed. No miracles may now be wrought in our behalf; but are there no "great and precious promises" that we do

well to despair? Even though our comforts should be taken from us, can he not turn our sorrow into joy, our darkness into light? To despair, is to distrust him who cannot be false to his word; it is to limit him whose resources are as boundless as the infinity of his nature. "Is the Lord's hand waxed short?" said God to Moses, when it seemed to him that all the herds, and even all the fish of the sea, could not suffice to feed so great a multitude in the wilderness. "Thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not."

The more God's people trust in him, the more they honor him and magnify his perfections. The stronger our faith, the greater the glory that redounds to God's name. The more implicit our reliance, the deeper will be our sense of his favor, and the broader the shield of his protection. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee."—"O fear the Lord, ye his saints, for there is no want to them that fear him."—"They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing."—"Behold, God is greater than man." Independent in his authority, he does according to his will. Omnipotent, his purpose cannot be frustrated. Infinite in wisdom and goodness, with him is "no variableness, neither shadow of turning." As he proved himself to be in the days of holy men of old, such is he now. He cannot deny himself; if his word fail—

"The pillared firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble."

To dispute God's authority, is disobedience; but to question his word, is to add insult to rebellion. If a

good man is sorely wounded by a want of confidence in his integrity, how much more must such a being as God be affected by any reluctance on the part of his creatures to either accredit his word or rely on his promises ! Hence, though God suffered the Samaritan lord to be convinced, he did not permit him to participate in the general joy. So when Israel skeptically inquired, “ Can God furnish a table in the wilderness ? ” we are told that the Lord heard it, and was wroth. And when such numbers perished in the wilderness, we are told that it was because of their unbelief. By unbelief, men so dishonor and displease God, that they deprive themselves of all the benefits which he may have held in reversion for them — actually frustrating the designs of his mercy and grace. Hence the importance attached to faith in the testimony of his son Jesus Christ.

“ Ye brainless wits, ye baptized infidels,
 Ye worse for mending, washed to fouler stains,
 The ransom *was paid down*, and paid —
 What can exalt the bounty more ? — *for you.* ”

Hence, also, we are warned “ against an evil heart prone to unbelief ” — “ lest we should fall after the same example of unbelief.”

In his punishment of unbelievers, God will be governed by no respect of persons. But how often is this principle of his government overlooked or unheeded ; how many flatter themselves in their own eyes, until it seems to them that God cannot and will not judge them as he may others ; that some other standard of judgment is due to them — men who are so exalted in public estimation, clad with so much honor, or gifted with such noble powers ! Religion is well enough for the general

mind, but for themselves, they are above all vulgar prejudices ; they are not to be cajoled—nothing short of demonstrative evidence can satisfy them ! Or, they are of too much consequence in the sight of men, to be condemned by God for a mere defect in faith ! So might he have reasoned on whose arm the king of Israel leaned ; but though he wore the badge of nobility, and enjoyed the highest proofs of royal confidence and favor, yet was he trodden to death by the people in the gateway, and simply because he had presumed to question the word of the Almighty ! Instead of being an apology, his rank was an aggravation of his unbelief ; and God, in causing him to be trampled to death, because of his unbelief, thereby proclaimed through all the land, that, though the advantages of birth and station might serve to extenuate crime among men, who are apt to be misled by sympathy or blinded by selfish interest, no one of the sons of men should anticipate exemption from the just punishment due to unbelief, be his worldly distinction from others what it may. In his sight, all men, as the subjects of his government, are on an equality—individually responsible for their belief as well as their deeds ; nor will the great God, after the manner of some corrupt legislation, punish in a poor and obscure man what he would overlook in a man of rank and influence. An earthly judge may be either bribed, flattered, or intimidated ; but to suppose that the Judge of all the earth could be unjust, is to forget that he is God, and not man. He now calls on all men, without distinction, to believe in Christ ; and woe be to him—no matter what his office in the state, or position in society

—what the superiority of his endowments, or the greatness of his achievements—who rejects the testimony which he has given of his Son! “He that believeth not shall be damned!” And who has said this, but the high and holy One? “Hath he said, and shall he not do it? hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good? The Lord is not a man, that he should lie; nor the son of man, that he should repent.” •

Whatever difficulties may embarrass one’s speculative inquiries, or however plausible the arguments by which he may contrive to hush the alarms of his guilty conscience—though he may think that greater evidence should be furnished for a mind so peculiarly constructed as his—the only question which will be put to him, and which peremptorily requires an immediate answer, is this: Does he believe God’s word, and rest for salvation from the wrath to come, on the faith in Christ? If not, then there is no alternative, no excuse, no help for him—his doom is sealed! As the Samaritan lord was trodden to death in the gate, so surely will that unbeliever “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord.”

It is not more certain that God’s promises to the righteous will be fulfilled, than that he will execute his threatenings against the wicked. All that God has promised to the former, they shall receive and enjoy. Yet a little while, and they shall “lift up their heads, and behold their redemption drawing nigh.” Singled out of “every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation,” they shall enter on the riches of “the inheritance of the saints in light.”

But what has become of those who rejected the discoveries of God's word, and would not accredit his promises to the faithful? Have they then the evidence that God hath "spoken unto us in these last days by his Son," and that he is able to save those who put their trust in him? Do they even behold what the righteous are permitted to enjoy? Yes—*there* is heaven! There are the shining ranks of angelic intelligence; there the rejoicing multitudes whose robes have been made white in the blood of the Lamb; there the resplendent and ineffable manifestations of the Divine presence:—

"It is glory beyond all glory ever seen,
By waking sense or by the dreaming soul!"

Fain would they now enter that world of light, and purity, and bliss; but ah! it is too late.

God is faithful, having promised—and so must he be true to himself, having threatened,—“The righteous enter life eternal; but the wicked go away into everlasting punishment.”

THE APOSTATE.

THE history of the Jewish kings, though it abounds in remarkable facts, is wanting in all that secures the interest of profane history. We read of political movements, military equipments, and bloody battles, but all is narrated in a manner, not to exalt the regal actor, but to exhibit his principles; not to incite a vain ambition, or thirst for martial glory—but to impress the fear of God, and the duty of obedience. Great achievements arrest attention, and great works rise upon our view; but they appear of subordinate moment compared with the religious character of him whose reign is depicted. In profane history, man is seen in his proud authority, ambitious plans, and selfish manœuvres; in sacred history, God is seen in his sovereignty over man—true to his word, and just in his dealings, though he may long “wait to be gracious.”

In the former, religion is state policy, and the priest but second to the king; in the latter, religion is the supreme law of the realm, and the king subordinate to the prophet. The king is placed on trial, and it soon appears whether he is a righteous or a wicked man, and whether his reign will be prosperous or disastrous. Whatever his principles or his passions—his virtues, his vices, or his foibles, all are seen, through his recorded

acts, with unerring distinctness. The history of other kings, however instructive to those who are called to occupy posts of authority and rule, can be of no practical benefit to the general mind. After traversing the voluminous pages of a Rollin or a Hume, much as we have gathered respecting any king in his relation to his subjects, we know little or nothing of him as a man, in his relation to God. But, in the sacred record, a few sentences suffice to reveal the actual character of a ruler, not merely as he seemed to men, but as he was in the sight of God. Hence, as the example of the king to his subjects, such may it now be (though at so long an interval) to us—either a pattern or a warning. Every man, whatever his sphere in life, is now tested, as were the kings of old; and the inspired record of their acts is as a mirror, in which he may behold his own moral self. The correctness of this view will appear from considering the acts of Amaziah, the eighth king of Judah, son and successor of Joash.*

At the commencement of his reign, he seemed to be most gentle and placable in his temper, and strongly disposed to serve God. He subjected his father's murderers to the penalty of the law, but spared their children; steadfastly opposed the worship of idols, but overlooked the practice of sacrificing in the high places. There was in him a strange blending of justice and lenity, of zeal and laxity, of religious principles and selfish interests; and, though to the eye of his subjects he presented the aspect of a good man and righteous prince, yet his heart was not perfect: he had no single-

* 2 Chronicles, chap. xxv.

ness of eye, no unreserved devotedness, no true humility. Under a prepossessing exterior lurked a love of excitement that betokened an unquiet reign; a thirst for power that might one day involve him in war; a pride that might betray him into malignant passions; and a regard for self that endangered his fealty to God. He supported the temple-service, yet his heart was more in military tactics than in the worship of God. He showed great respect for the law, but it was not after "the manner of David."

Without consulting the Divine pleasure, he projected an expedition against the Edomites; and though God had favored him, in enabling him to collect so large and well-equipped an army, that there was no likelihood of any king competing with him in numbers, yet, as a precautionary measure, he must hire a hundred thousand allies, and these, too, from among an idolatrous people! They, however, were at last dismissed, at the instance of a prophet whom God had sent to remonstrate with him against the measure, and who assured him that, notwithstanding his loss of the hundred talents which he had advanced to his mercenaries, God was able to recompense him a hundredfold. But, in yielding to the prophet, it is not improbable he was influenced partly by the fear of losing his life should he persist in his plan, and partly by the hope of some great reward for his pecuniary sacrifice. Duty entered not into his councils; and hence, success only served to develop the latent and ruling elements of his character.

He had defeated the armies of Edom in a pitched battle, and, thinking to spread the opinion of his strength

and the terror of his arms, had forced ten thousand of the fugitives over a precipice ; and now he is rejoicing in his triumph, and instead of acknowledging his obligations to the God of battles, actually paying homage to the idol-gods of the conquered Edomites ! In vain did the prophet rebuke him for worshipping idols which had not been able to deliver their votaries from the power of his sword. So far from listening to such timely counsel, he sternly bade the prophet forbear, on penalty of his displeasure ; and, yielding to the promptings of his pride and revenge, not only determined to inflict summary vengeance on those who, on being dismissed from his army, had plundered the country through which they returned, but to challenge the king of Israel. This defiance, though at first treated with contemptuous ridicule, Jehoash was eventually forced to accept. The sarcastic parable of the wild beast treading down a proud thistle that had demanded the daughter of a strong and stately cedar in marriage, served to exasperate the proud conqueror of Edom ; and, without admitting to himself the possibility of defeat, he forthwith invaded the domains of his kingly neighbor. But he has presumed on his own greatness, underrated his enemy's strength, and, above all, forgotten that God had a controversy with him for his obstinate idolatry. The battle-field of Bethshemesh signalized his defeat, and sealed his disgrace. Instead of returning as a hero with the trophies of victory, he is himself a prisoner—carried back to Jerusalem by him whom he had so haughtily challenged, and there forced not only to give up a large number of hostages to secure the peace, but to witness the sad

demolition of a part of the wall of the city, and the pillage of the temple and palace. Still, his reverses did not humble him; and though he was permitted to reign for fifteen years after his captivity, yet he “did not return unto the Lord.” On the contrary, he waxed worse and worse, until his iniquities and idolatries were no longer to be endured, even by his own subjects. In vain did he attempt to flee from the conspiracy which had been formed against him: Lachish could furnish no hiding-place for one whom “God had determined to destroy.” He who was once surrounded by three hundred thousand troops, is now without a solitary aid. He who thrust ten thousand of his fellow-creatures from off the brink of an awful precipice, now falls himself—unpitied, unlamented—by the hand of his servants!

But the case of Amaziah is only one of the numerous instances of apostasy and its consequences which stain the annals of Judaism. We look back on such instances with astonishment—especially when we consider that their religion had been authenticated and established by a series of miraculous events, and that temporal rewards and punishments invariably followed the Hebrew rulers, according as they obeyed or disobeyed the Divine requirements. But though length of days and general prosperity were the portion of those who conscientiously observed the Mosaic enactments—and poverty, disease, war, and a violent death, the threatened consequences of their violation—yet the very fact that the Mosaic economy was burdened with minute and irksome ceremonies, might have induced an indisposition to obey, and rendered every temptation to remissness or neglect

only the more insidiously effective; while familiarity with the regular course of things under that dispensation might have impaired, in the Hebrew mind, the force which seems to us to be attached to the idea of temporal sanctions. It is a question, moreover, whether similar reverses in life were not observable among the surrounding heathen nations; and if so, the human mind might then, as now, have been prone to rest in second causes: or, while observing the course of things, many a one, through the "deceitfulness of sin," might have secretly indulged the hope of sinning with impunity. Besides, as the change which the government of the Hebrews had undergone in its external form, from the judicial and patriarchal to the monarchical, its original theocratic element was gradually lost sight of; and it is not improbable they came at last to think that they should vie in their manners and customs with the kings of the heathen nations. Such were seen to be both large and flourishing, notwithstanding their idolatries; and thus the Hebrew kings might have been tempted to think that the gods of those ancient kingdoms—Assyria and Egypt—were not, after all, so inferior in power to Jehovah himself.* Aside from these considerations—

* The causes of apostasy from a pure faith are always analogous, however different the circumstances of its development, or the objects of idolatrous devotion. Most instances that may be gathered from the records of early Christianity, were owing, not so much to persecution—for this tends to energize rather than to disperse the adherents of any cause—but to the seductive influences of Grecian mythology. Christianity imposed restraints on the wonted thoughts and passions of human nature, while paganism was not incompatible with the most licentious skepticism. To us, the deities of Olympus are no less idols, because less gross in their forms, than those which apostate Israel worshipped. Yet we can readily conceive by how easy a process a mind susceptible of lively impressions, might have been gradually led, notwithstanding

that the kings of Israel so often apostatized, is, in fact, no more incredible or unaccountable, than that men are now but seldom restrained from following their own hearts' lusts, though they are not ignorant of the natural consequences of vice. They may have even seen its effects on the health, and character, and property, of many of its victims ; yet how often do they act as if they

the restraints of an early Christian education, to make an offering of its reason on the altars of Jupiter and Apollo. Amid the magnificence of heathen temples—the embodied conceptions of poets, as displayed in the chiselled marble and speaking canvas—the pomp of festivals and sacrifices, and the traditions of oracles and prodigies, all consecrated in the estimation of the people by ancient practice—Christianity had as little in its outward forms to impose on the popular credulity, as in its principles to prepossess the sensual judgment. Compared with the time-honored usages and associations of the Grecian mythology, it labored under a disadvantage not unlike that of a protestant church, recently planted in the midst of a community which has been long swayed by the gorgeous rites and flexible principles of Romanism, and where interest lends its aid to the seductions of enthroned error. In the days, too, of Porphyry and Julian, those apostates from Christianity, genius and learning were associated with the pagan religion. One could conform to the vulgar superstitions, and be in only the higher repute among the disciples of Plato or the lovers of Homer. In like manner, the kings of Judah might have thought to promote their personal respectability, and elevate themselves in the rank of nations, by conforming to the idolatrous rites of kingdoms greater than their own. Perhaps there was much in both the Assyrian and Egyptian mode of worship to impress a mind at all addicted to superstitious fears, and elicit at least temporary assent to fables, however repugnant they were to reason and experience, as well as to the principles of the Hebrew's faith. Certain it is, that which to our view is but wood or stone, was then the emblem of some supernatural attribute, as but a *lump of clay* once seemed to the senate and people of Rome endowed with life, and sentiment, and divine power. For aught we can adduce to the contrary, the apostate kings of Judah would have indignantly repelled the charge of idolatry ; flattering themselves, while countenancing heathen rites, that they were only exploring that occult wisdom which the prudence of antiquity had disguised in forms and fables, just as Porphyry did in his day ; or, as the proselyte to Romanism, in affecting to have discovered some profound ecclesiastical sense in unscriptural rites and usages, contrives at once to retain his self-respect, and shield his conscience from the charge of apostasy from the Christian faith.

could violate the laws of their moral and physical being with impunity ! Neither are they blind to the noontide evidences with which Christianity accompanies its claim on their faith and obedience ; yet how often do they persist in their sins as securely as though the wrath of God had not been revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness among men !

It may be thought, however, that the Hebrews, as a people, were without adequate religious instruction, and that the prophets themselves were at fault. If there was at any period a lack of knowledge, the lips of the priest had been sealed by the tyranny of some apostate ruler ; and though there were from time to time false prophets, as there are now false teachers, yet is it evident that, from the days of Solomon down to the return from the Babylonish captivity, there was a succession of illustrious men whose province it was to instruct in all matters appertaining to the law, as well as to receive and communicate the Divine will : men who engaged in no business nor adopted any habits inconsistent with that tranquillity of mind which their sacred calling required, and whose simplicity of life accorded with the dignity of their office and the purport of their teachings : men whom selfishness could not bribe, nor power awe ; and who, being free from the allurements of avarice, and alike independent of both king and people, acted with promptitude, and spoke to the purpose, with a clearness of utterance none could mistake, and a faithfulness few could withstand. Acting as messengers between Jehovah and his earthly representatives, their influence was without a parallel ; nor did it cease when they in turn

ceased to be known among the living. Their predictions remained, to be attested by the developments of ages ; their instructions, to guide and guard the mind of each succeeding generation ; and their example, to animate the timid, and nerve them for a holy warfare with spiritual wickedness in high places. And though the enemy should now come in like a flood, and thick darkness overspread the prospects of Zion, the names of the prophets will again be as watchwords in the city of our God ; and like signal-fires, blazing from afar and streaming through the lapse of ages, will serve to reunite the dejected followers of the Lamb, and bid them hope !

But if, notwithstanding the instructions they enjoyed and the warnings they received, the Jewish people, with their kings, so often apostatized, what had been the religious condition of Judea—wherein would she have differed from polytheistic nations—if her hills had never echoed to the voice of her heaven-sent seers, nor her high places so often witnessed the miraculous attestation of their word ?

Even now, some are not backward to reflect on the efficiency of the church, and the faithfulness of her ministry to the world around ; but if, in spite of the combined influences of Christian instructions and ordinances, there are such repeated and deplorable departures from Christian faith and practice, what would be the condition of society, and the prospects of the world, were the church disbanded, and the voice of her ministry silenced !

But the history of Amaziah, in its essential features, may serve to illustrate the course of not a few at the

present day. At first they show signs of being influenced by a regard to “the law and the testimony :” in many things they cannot be distinguished from the truly religious ; but their heart is not whole with God. There is a latent deference to the ways of the world—a hankering after its riches, its honors, or its pleasures ; and hence, when placed in circumstances of trial, they begin to sacrifice duty to interest, and conscience to inclination—to multiply their worldly relations, and strengthen their worldly interests—even as Amaziah sought the aid of an idolatrous people to further his ambitious projects. Thus alliances are formed with unbelievers for worldly ends ! Thus means, in themselves unlawful, are sometimes employed to effect good ends. Thus, the capital invested in an iniquitous business, has led many a man to resist the demands of justice and humanity—and the fear of pecuniary loss, to withstand the claims of Christian benevolence. It is by occasionally yielding to the promptings of worldly interest, that a neglect of all religious duties ultimately ensues ; it is in consequence of having always had some private end to answer, that the man who might have seemed to be religious, betrays at last his real character. In this way we account for the lamentable fact, that some, who once made a creditable profession of faith, have, through the gradual ascendancy of worldly interests over their hearts, been seduced into infidelity ; and that others were led on from one little act of overreaching to another, until “the hundred talents of silver”—some great temptation—overcame whatever moral principle was left, and blasted their character. Men of this class may

not have been hypocrites. It is not necessary to conclude that such embraced religion to advance their interests in life : they deceived themselves—either mistaking their intellectual convictions for a change in their affections, or their willingness to submit to the outward requirements of religion, for a love of truth and duty, as they might have prepossessed others in favor of their piety, by their acts of goodness.

Amaziah should have obeyed the command of the Most High instantly and cheerfully, whatever might have been the personal sacrifice inseparable from obedience. But the question which he proposed to the prophet—"What shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel?"—plainly showed that he had no singleness of heart—though at first he had done what the law required. He would have obeyed, if obedience had cost him nothing ! but so expensive a proof made him hesitate ; nor would he at last have yielded, had not the strongest motives been addressed at once to his hopes and to his fears.

Thus, too, may men be found at the present day, who, in all requirements which clash not with their inclinations, seem to be religious ; but make known to them some duty that demands self-denial, and it seems to them unreasonably severe, highly inexpedient, if not impracticable. Had it occurred to them before, they would have done otherwise, but now it is too late. If it be duty, it cannot be discharged consistently with a wise and prudent regard to their worldly interests : the loss will be too great—not to be retrieved by years of toil. What shall we do ? ' I have made my arrangements to

go,' says one: 'I have formed the alliance,' says another: 'I have invested a hundred talents in the enterprise,' says a third; or, 'Others will have the benefits, though I should withdraw.' Such are some of the expedients of the worldly mind to evade the requisitions of known duty; and whether the amount involved be more or less; whether the self-denial required have reference to a secular engagement which is incompatible with the enjoyment of religious privileges and the claims of charity—to an interest in some moneyed company, which for gain desecrates the Sabbath of the Lord, or repudiates its engagements—to the prosecution of a business, in itself immoral, or which trenches on those hours that belong to God and the soul—or to those places of worldly amusement, and parties of pleasure, and habits of living, to forego which, is thought to involve the loss of *standing* in society;—the principle of disobedience to Heaven's requirements is the same,—be it detected in the cautious capitalist, the grasping speculator, the ambitious demagogue, or in the frivolous fashionist. Nor is it merely with reference to such cases, or only occasionally, that we are virtually called on to decide whether we will forego interest for duty, or sacrifice duty for selfish gain and pleasure; every day brings with it its trial of our faith and principles; and according as we decide, either for or against *duty*, such are we—either the servants of God or the worshippers of mammon.

Amaziah did at last decide to dismiss his mercenary troops, though he knew that by so doing he incurred the loss of a hundred talents of silver; but he acted

not from a principle of cordial obedience. Perhaps, as soon as the prophet left him, his fears subsided, and he regretted the sacrifice which he had made ; or, when removed from the restraining influence of so holy a man, he might have felt himself at liberty to act out the impulses of his own heart.

To what fearful changes is our nature liable ! How insidious, yet how rapid, the process by which a heart of flesh becomes a heart of stone ! He who was once so gentle toward his subjects, who would on no account consent to the execution of the murderer's children—has just driven ten thousand captive Edomites to a frightful death ! He who quailed before the prophet, and trembled in view of the consequences of going contrary to the will of Heaven, could turn a deaf ear to the frantic shrieks of so many helpless mortals ; and as he stood on Sela,* could look down with an eye of vindictive triumph on the mighty heaps of the dying and the dead. And now the king who had been brought up in the knowledge and service of the God of Israel—who would allow none of his subjects, on penalty of the law, to worship any strange god,—returns to Jerusalem with the spoils of the slain ; and in the presence of his people—at the threshold of the holy temple—burns incense to the idol-gods of the Edomites !

This has been regarded as an unaccountable circumstance. But it was in our view, the natural consequence of a heart that, from the first, had not been whole with God. He who sanctioned the practice of

* *Sela*, in the Hebrew language, corresponds to *Petra* in the Greek—the Rock.

offering sacrifices in the high places, could not have been very strict in his principles, or decided in his antipathies to idol-worship ; and a change of circumstances might readily induce a change of life : as he who, notwithstanding his acknowledgment of the authority of God's written word, connives at popish rites, or sanctions uncommanded fasts and festivals, is prepared, when circumstances favor, to bring in the gods of Rome.

Jeroboam's idolatry, while it betrayed an inherent predilection for a false religion, was an expedient to retain the allegiance of his subjects, already fascinated by the idols of the heathen ; just as false teachers gather followers and retain their influence by sanctioning worldly customs, and giving utterance to the prejudices of that "carnal mind," which "is enmity against God."

Solomon, in giving unbridled license to his desires, became at last their slave, and the tool of those by whom they were excited ; and his apostasy may be explained by the fact that the passions and appetites, when indulged to excess, always gain the mastery over reason. But the difficulty in assigning a satisfactory reason for Amaziah's apostasy, arises from his having selected as his idols the gods of a people whom he had just subdued. Yet he might have thought, in the grossness of his heart, that since the gods of the Edomites had deserted them for him, they had some claims on his grateful homage—as Ahaz aimed to propitiate the idols of Syria, which he imagined had been the authors of his calamities.

Possibly he was haunted by the remembrance of his cruelty toward the Edomites, and therefore sought to

allay the terrors of his excited imagination by deprecating the wrath of their gods; for the blacker the enormity of one's deeds, the more readily may the grossest superstition be practised, in the hope of relief from the action of a guilty heart. Hence it has been observed, that they who undertake the most criminal and dangerous enterprises, are commonly the most superstitious.* Thus Catiline was not contented with the established deities and received rites of the national faith. His anxious terrors made him seek *new* inventions of the kind, which had never occurred to him had he remained obedient to the laws of his country.†

It is not to be presumed, however, that Amaziah from the first had deliberately resolved to apostatize from the God of Israel. Not improbably the gods of Edom were of gold, and being curiously wrought, they gratified his eye; and, in carrying them off, his primary design might have been simply to adorn his "high places" with the spoils of victory. Thus the final apostasy of Ahaz may be referred to his visit to Damascus, where he saw an idolatrous altar, with the style of which he was so much pleased, that he sent a plan of it to Urijah to form one similar, and to place it in the room of the brazen altar which had been erected by Solomon. Wide departures from the simplicity of primitive faith and worship often have their beginning in changes which are regarded simply as improvements, or the evidences of a mind enlarged by travel and refined by classic culture. No people ever apostatized all at once from the true worship of God, and but few, if any, have at first had the

* Diod. Sic., lib. xv. † Cic. Catil., i.; Sall. de Catil. Conj.

remotest conception of the lengths to which they have gone.

Whatever his reason, Amaziah's idolatry has its spiritual parallel in him who returns from his foreign sojourn with sentiments inconsistent with the teachings of God's word, and with customs at variance with the integrity of Christian faith ; in him who, on performing some great work for the church, yields to the returning dominion of his own heart's lusts ; or in the man who, through his anxiety to deliver himself from the evils of poverty and obscurity, becomes enslaved to the riches he has acquired, or the honors he has won—as Cadmus, on destroying the dragons which defended the fountain sacred to Mars, was consequently involved in a servitude of years to the god of war.

The propensity of the human heart is still to idol-worship ; nor is the idolatry less criminal in the sight of high Heaven, because its outward development may be mistaken by the world as the indication of a superior civilization and refined taste. Man is still prone to depart from God ; and in adopting notions and conforming to practices foreign from the word of God, may give evidence of apostasy as real, though not as palpable to vulgar apprehension, as if he had bowed to Amaziah's idols—or, with Julian, substituted the *ancilia* for the cross, and consecrated his powers to the honor of Cybele.

Instead of driving the captives, had the king only cast their idols, down the precipice, it would have been an easy proof of his deference to God, and one that might have readily occurred to any mind not lost to all regard for the right. But it is the infirmity of our na-

ture not always to be aware of the folly of an act until it is done ; nor always to be sensible of our guilt, even when it is apparent to others. How true is it that sin infatuates to destroy ! Had the king not been as foolhardy as he was criminal, he would have repented.

Though infidels have been forward to asperse the character of the Hebrew's God—to represent him as arbitrary, unjust, and implacable, in no respect harmonizing with *their idea* of the God of the universe—yet they have only betrayed their ignorance, both of the nature of his government and the history of his people. He is indeed seen to be “a holy and jealous God ;” but it is equally apparent that “he is long-suffering and slow to anger.” Amaziah himself had still space to repent. Notwithstanding his heinous offences, God, in infinite mercy, sent unto him a prophet, to bring him, if possible, to the penitent acknowledgment of his sins. Had the prophet charged him with his cruelty to the Edomites, he could not have exculpated himself on the ground of their incorrigible idolatry, because he could have shown no such commission as had authorized Joshua to exterminate the Canaanites ; and though such an act—abhorrent from every sentiment of humanity—seems to us more criminal than the burning of incense to idols, yet idolatry was the sin of sins under that dispensation, as unbelief in Christ is under the gospel. The latter carries with it the highest possible affront to God ; for “he that believeth not the record which God hath given unto us of his Son, hath made him a liar :” and, in like manner, idolatry not merely impugned the authority of God's law, it aspersed his perfections, and

assailed his throne. To worship an idol, was virtually to wrest from God the sceptre of the universe; and therefore the prophet—true to Him by whom he had been sent, and more deeply affected by Amaziah's idolatry than he had been even by his cruelty—forthwith said unto him, “Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people of Edom?” What unaccountable ingratitude to Him who rendered you victorious! what a heinous affront to the majesty of Heaven!

The king could not answer the prophet; but, as is always the case with men when convicted of sins they are unwilling to renounce, he charged him with insolent obtrusiveness on his counsels, and even threatened to smite him, if he did not desist. The prophet might have anticipated such treatment, but it had not deterred him; nor should the apprehension of incurring a guilty man's displeasure withhold one from the duty of Christian reproof. Or, he might have thought that, as the king had been prevailed on by a prophet to dismiss his idolatrous mercenaries, so he might be induced to throw away his idols. But, whatever the probable result of his interview with the guilty king, the prophet's duty was clear. To have refrained from expostulating with him from motives of self-interest, or any reference to the probable uselessness of an attempt to reclaim him, would have been to connive at his idolatry; but having now discharged his duty, he can do no more: the king must be left to his own course; and so deep was the prophet's conviction of his obstinate persistence in apostasy, that, as he turned away, he pronounced his doom: “I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, be-

cause thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel."

Amazing infatuation—to give up God for an idol! that God who made the heavens! Words are inadequate to express the irrationality, the debasement, implied in such an exchange. The record of such an act almost staggers credulity. Yet such is the infatuation of human nature even now; such the perversity of every man who gives up God for the world—a world which, with all its riches and honors, all the wisdom of its philosophy, all the resources of its arts and sciences—is just as impotent to save the soul as the idols of Edom were to rescue Amaziah from destruction! "How much for how little!" exclaimed an ancient prince who, in his extremity, had exchanged his kingdom for a draught of dirty water. But taking into view all that is implied in the loss of the soul, the worldling, in giving up God, gives up heaven for less than nothing and vanity. "This is all that remains to Saladin, the conqueror of the world," said the criers as they carried his winding-sheet around the city: such is all that will remain to any one who foregoes the favor of God for the things of the world. Yet, strange as it may seem, the more glaring man's folly, the greater his reluctance to be reminded of it; in proportion as he hankers after some worldly interest, is his aversion from all religious restraints, and his displeasure at reproof.

No matter what may be his sin, if a man can listen to the voice of kind and faithful expostulation, there is ground for hope that he will yet repent; but to repel the admonition of Heaven, is an ominous sign! All is

wrong with that man, and will be worse! In hating reproof, he proves his love for his sins. In rejecting the counsel of God, he grieves the Spirit of God. He must persist in his sins, despite of all warnings, for he is joined to his idols.

God may have said: ‘Let him live, but *let him alone*; let him go on to gather up riches, to win honors, or to revel in sensual gratifications.’ Others, as far from God as he is, may deem him a prosperous man, or envy him his abundance; but “I know that God hath determined to destroy him,” because he has given himself to the world, and has not hearkened to the warning voice of Heaven’s mercy!

Had the king’s heart, then, only been at first whole with God, how different would have been his course! To this radical defect in his character may be traced that worldly policy which caused him to deviate from the right, and which eventuated in his apostasy. Hence the importance of a right heart at the beginning of a religious life. Without this, there will be irresolution, wavering, and inconsistency—alternate observances and neglects, remissness and worldliness—an ague-fit, from hot to cold, from one passion to another, quite contrary—until God’s service ceases to interest, and the world clinches its hold on our affections.

What a contrast between the king and the prophet, in their respective views of duty, and sentiments toward God!—the former, swayed by motives of worldly interest; the latter, recognising no interest separate from obedience; the one contending, as it were, for self and sin, the other true to God and the soul.

To the eye of the prophet, how great and glorious must God have seemed ! Dwelling in the light of his uncreated purity, he cannot look on sin but with abhorrence. The giver of life, and breath, and all things, he has a right to require any sacrifice at the hands of his dependent creatures. Sovereign in his authority, infinite in wisdom, and resistless in power, he can abundantly recompense any sacrifice for his sake. There is sublimity in the prophet's simple and concise enunciations to the king : " God hath power to help and to cast down. The Lord is able to give thee much more than this." To take in their full meaning and force, is to rise to the conception of God's universal and all-controlling agency, as the Creator of heaven and earth, and the Sovereign Disposer of the lots of all beings for time and eternity ! To admit their truth, may be simply an act of the reason ; but to rest the soul on them, and go forth to battle with life's temptations, with the assurance that God will be " our exceeding great reward," requires a faith in God which Amaziah did not possess.

God could have more than made amends to him for the loss of his hundred talents ; he could have rendered all surrounding nations tributary to his resources, and secured to him a long and prosperous reign. So has he now all the treasures of earth and the kingdoms of the world at his disposal. He can prosper us in our business beyond our most sanguine expectations—exalt us to honor, or invest us with affluence—and that in a way we could not have foreseen, and at a time we could not have anticipated.

This will be admitted by all who do not deny his

providence ; yet it is equally clear from his word that he requires of us no sacrifice which he will not overrule for good. Comprehending at one view all times and relations, all beings and interests, he knows what is best for each of his servants—in what station, and under what circumstances, each in his sphere in life will most effectually answer the great end of his providence. Hence the difference in his providential arrangements : yet, in giving to one, and withholding from another, he is influenced by the same beneficent purpose ; and never exacts any sacrifice of worldly gain that is not for their good, and which he will not abundantly repay. Not that he will always repay the loss of present interest by greater riches, but he will by greater comfort in what remains. Not that he may not see fit to impose heavy afflictions on them, notwithstanding their sacrifices to duty—as he permitted the Israelites to harass the cities of Judah, though Amaziah had submitted to the loss of his talents—but their afflictions shall serve to “work out for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Sacrifices to duty are inseparable from a state of moral trial and discipline. Certain things are wrong—not to be for a moment done or countenanced by one who regards the honor of God and his soul's good ; certain things must be foregone, however contrary the duty may be to the will of the flesh, or to the dictates of worldly policy. There is no third choice ; the sacrifice must be made, or we cannot be Christ's disciples.

Yet such is the perversity of our nature, that we are not more reluctant to part with some forbidden interest,

for the sake of Christ, than prone to rely for acceptance in the sight of God on some sacrifice already made. This, in all probability, was the cause of Amaziah's subsequent acts of disobedience and folly. He had given up the hundred talents; it was a meritorious act in his estimation: God must repay him for so great a loss. Is it an unreasonable supposition? Why is it, then, that so many who have made sacrifices, now make them no more; that the complacent remembrance of some one duty discharged at the cost of certain worldly interests, makes amends for all subsequent neglects and habitual self-indulgence? The history of Amaziah teaches this, if nothing else—that no former sacrifice of interest to duty will be accepted as an excuse for going on in sin.

But his first mistake was in hiring the Israelites and preparing for his military expedition without having inquired of the Lord. This was his imperative duty—a duty which all the religious kings of Judah had not failed to observe, and for the neglect of which there was the less excuse under a dispensation that secured special direction to every sincere inquirer of God's will before his holy altar.

But they who are bent on following their own wills, seldom take the pains to ascertain the will of Heaven. The more intent they may be on worldly ends, the more desirous are they of avoiding, rather than of seeking, the requirements of duty. For this reason, Amaziah did not care to seek the Divine blessing: it would have been to abandon a project which, though not sanctioned by the law, was perhaps the less criminal, in his view,

if undertaken without any direct reference to the will of the Most High.

Ominous omission! revealing to us the state of the heart not less distinctly than the confession of the lips; proclaiming what, if honest, the worldling will not deny—that he wishes not to be thwarted in his sinful purpose, nor troubled with “compunctious visitings.” Excuseless omission! nor the less so, because some may think it difficult now to ascertain the will of God, or that others, through the delusions of enthusiasm, have mistaken the path of duty. We have no such appointed method for seeking counsel from God, as his ancient people enjoyed; but we have that word which he has given unto us, as the only rule of faith and practice: and whatever the duty we may wish to ascertain, we can ask God himself, in the way of his own express appointment, to aid us in the inquiry; to disabuse our minds of false impressions; to clear our vision from the mists of ignorance, prejudice, and passion; to purify our hearts, and make us willing to receive the truth in the love of it; to examine ourselves in the light of his word, and to dispose us to defer to the result of our scriptural inquiry, whether that be for or against our proposed undertaking.

To go to the Scriptures without prayer, is to “lean to our own understandings” and “trust in our own hearts.” To bring to the inquiry either the prejudices or the prepossessions of the carnal mind, is to wrest the import of scriptural passages to suit our purpose. But to go to the word of God with a sincere, and humble, and prayerful desire to ascertain the nature of any particular

step—whether it is approved or condemned either by the letter or the spirit of the gospel—whether it will, on the whole, tend to promote the glory of God and the good of man—is to ascertain clearly and certainly the *will of God*. If we cannot satisfy ourselves that the step is accordant with the mind of the Spirit, and that it will conduce to our own and the best interests of those with whom we are connected, then, no matter what worldly advantages it may promise, it is contrary to the will of God for us to take that step—for us it is sin.

There is, therefore, no security for one, no matter what his religious advantages, the moment he begins to yield to the suggestions of worldly interest, and either violates or neglects known duty. He may become an apostate ; he will backslide. He may be drawn into the commission of flagrant acts of selfishness ; he will lose his religious impressions and blunt his moral sensibilities. Whatever his besetting sin, it will become the more operative from being indulged, until our neighbor's rights and the honor of religion are of no account compared with the gratification of self. Thus the love of pleasure tends to harden the heart ; of power, tempts to intrigue, defamation, and wrong ; of gain, to deception, overreaching, and extortion. Thus, too, do unlawful alliances necessarily impair the sentiment of fealty to God ; while sinful pursuits lead on from the neglect of one duty to the violation of another, and, from growing indifference to religion, to final apostasy from the faith. In like manner, that money which is retained or got at the expense of truth and justice, will pierce the soul with many sorrows ; and those honors won at the cost of a

neighbor's rights, will rivet the chains which bind the soul to earth. Yes ; and those ordinances neglected for the sake of worldly recreation, those Sabbaths violated for the sake of gain, all will rise up in judgment to condemn the worldling.

Be nothing, then, in the world's estimation, rather than conspicuous and renowned, to the sacrifice of Heaven's approving smile. Have nothing—starve, rather than grow rich in a way God has forbidden. Such is the answer which an inquirer after duty would receive, were he to consult the sacred oracles.

If, however, duty is naught to him, and the world all—then let him go on, and get gain, and power, and pleasure, in any way he can, no matter what law of Heaven is trampled under foot ; let him make every “provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof.” But he should be *strong for the battle* ; for the day of retribution is at hand, when God shall deal with him ! God is able to make him fall. “He has power to cast into hell.” — “The wicked shall not stand in the judgment.”

THE WISE MAN'S CONTRASTS.

THE human mind is prone to extremes. No matter what the object of its thoughts, it seldom preserves a just medium either in its pursuits, its sentiments, or its emotions. It is either immoderate or remiss; bigoted or latitudinarian; fanatical or formal; volatile and frivolous, or gloomy and despondent. Now visions of bliss float before its eye, and anon forms of terror haunt its fancy. Now it surrenders itself to the gratifications of sense, as though there were no happiness apart from sensual indulgences; and again it shrinks even from innocent pleasures as from images of death. Hence, we find among the ancients, the Epicureans and the Stoics: Alcibiades, on the one hand, as the personification of sensualism, and Diogenes, on the other, as the personification of asceticism. Thence follows the monk with his crucifix, his cowl, and his dreary cave, as opposed to the bearing and habits of the gay cavalier; and these have given place in turn to the radical religionist, as opposed to the baptized fashionist. Even our modern schools of philosophy are arrayed against each other by the antagonist systems of sensualism and idealism.

But herein is the beneficent distinction of Christianity as a moral code. It avoids all extremes, and sanctions no extravagance. So far from recognising the cloistered

cell, it sends us to the busy haunts of men—teaching us that “no man liveth unto himself,” and that he who provideth not “for those of his own house, hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.” So far from exacting in tribute the “lees and settlings of a melancholy blood,” it teaches us “to rejoice with those who do rejoice,” and “to use the world as not abusing it.” —“Eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart. Let thy garments be always white; and let thy head lack no ointment. Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of thy life.”

“How charming is divine philosophy!—
Not harsh and crabbed, as dull fools suppose,
But musical as is Apollo's lute,
And a perpetual feast of nectared sweets,
Where no crude surfeit reigns.”

No feature of our holy religion is more to be admired than this—that while it enjoins what is right, it forbids nothing that is innocent; while it cautions us against forgetting ourselves, it would not prevent us from enjoying ourselves—aiming, as it does, to make us spiritual, but not at the expense of the conditions of animal life; pure, but not to the impeachment of Divine wisdom, “for every creature of God is good;” happy, not in forgetfulness of the end of our being, but by means of our moral discipline, and preparation for another and better world.

In accordance with these views is the observation of Solomon, that “it is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting.”* Not that it is *wrong* to go to the house of feasting: there are times

* Eccles. vii. 2, 4.

when we may, without impropriety, and for wise ends, meet around the festive board, or join the social circle; but it is *better* to go to the house of mourning. This may appear to be a strange estimation of life: better to see tears than smiles, to hear groans than laughter, to be environed by gloom and sadness than to bathe in sunlight! Such a sentiment must needs awaken a host of repellant associations, and not a few will be forward to dissent from Solomon's judgment, notwithstanding his world-wide reputation for wisdom.

But it will not be questioned, by any reflecting mind, that the house of feasting tends to excite and foster emotions unfavorable to religion. Where is it that pride and vanity so often enter, or that sinful passions are so often enkindled, as in the house of feasting? When fashion attires herself in costliest style, and beauty wreathes her brow, and grace lends enchantment to the dance, and music's sweetest strains fall upon the ravished ear, how readily may the heart be betrayed; and how much greater the danger when the richest viands and the choicest wines conspire to stimulate the palate and exhilarate the spirits! Hence the insincere compliment, the sinful compliance, the profane witticism, the immoderate indulgence, the adulterous eye and sinister purpose — pride, too, either gratified or offended, giving rise in turn to haughtiness and to hate, to undue elation and gloomy jealousy. Whoever has entered the house of feasting, can bear witness to its numberless appeals to all that is opposed to either lowliness or purity of heart; and, among those who mingle in the favorite scenes of worldly pleasure, not one perhaps ever retires

to his pillow with the conviction that his heart is the better in the sight of God.

Indeed, if any scenes be peculiarly suited to avert reflection, and shut out of view all that concerns man's well-being, it is such as are implied in the house of feasting. Not unfrequently, the express object is to enchant the eye, enchain the ear, tempt the appetite, and enamor the heart, and, by consequence, to exclude whatever tends to moderate indulgence, or serves to restrain worldly pleasure:—

“Let joy be unconfined:
No sleep till morn, when youth and pleasure meet
To chase the glowing hours with flying feet!”

And when this is the case—and it is always so when religion is intentionally excluded—then the house of feasting is replete with the most insidious temptations; and he who enters it must leave behind him all circumspection and seriousness, and surrender his soul to its intoxicating scenes. Hence, the house of feasting tends to rivet around the heart the chains of worldliness, to deaden the sensibilities to all that is kind in sympathy, virtuous in happiness, ennobling in action, or important in life. In this house, how often has the heart been lifted up to forget God! has an unconquerable prejudice been imbibed against religion! has it become the aim of one's life to give and receive entertainments, to win admiration for self by ministering to the pleasures of others!—thus steeling the heart in many instances against both the woes and the rights of others, that there may be no deficiency in the means of worldly display.

It was in the house of feasting that Belshazzar praised

the gods of gold and of silver, and read his doom ; that Sardanapalus was surprised and ruined ; that Ahasuerus insulted and dethroned his queen ; that Jehoshaphat was seduced by Ahab ; that Alexander killed Clitus ; that Baasha was murdered by Zimri ; and that Herod gave the order for the execution of a man of God. And still it is true that in this house of feasting are many foes to man's best interests—not the less dangerous because seldom seen and never heeded—deadly foes to his sincerity, his virtue, his sobriety, his charity, his religion. Amid the excitements of company, he is apt to forget his responsibility, and, amid the seductions of sense, to lose sight of the interests of his soul—intent as he there is on pleasures which respect no natural sentiment, and preclude all real satisfaction—pleasures which allure to deceive, and infatuate to destroy their votaries for time and eternity.

At the present day, there is an intimate connection established by the customs of society between this house of feasting, and certain houses of worldly amusement, and dishonest games, and degrading sensuality ; houses where life is so represented in scenic acts as to unhinge the mind for real life ; where the gambler lies in wait to allure the idle, and entrap the unwary ; where the strange woman displays her fatal charms ; or where the demon of intemperance arrays his damning goblets ; houses which bear over their respective gateways the same inscription : “This is the way to hell, leading down to the chambers of death.”

Hence the greater danger of going once too often to this house of feasting, or of ever forgetting while there

that life has its duties as well as its pastimes ; that though well-timed recreation recruits exhausted strength, dissipation destroys it ; that while all the senses may in turn be not unlawfully gratified, “the heart should be kept with all diligence.”

Solomon's judgment was the result of his own observation and experience ; and though the house of feasting to which he referred may have changed its form and style since his day, it is still the same in its character and tendency. Here it is that the love of dress and company, of ease and pleasure, of balls and routs, of shows and games, has been indulged—unfitting one for either studious thought or rational enjoyment ; perverting natural sensibility and moral principle ; hopelessly enervating mind and body ; and thus developing the character of either the pitiable fashionist or the despicable loungeur. Here it is, too, that many a young man began his downward career—disregarding instruction, despising warnings, abusing his time and talents ; drinking deeper of the cup of madness, until they who looked forward to him as the prop of their declining years, bowed their heads in shame and anguish over his untimely grave. Here, too, those tastes and appetites were formed which are estranging that man from the duties and endearments of home. The evening seldom finds him in the midst of his once-loved family. And now the night is far spent.—Those little ones have ceased to weep in sympathy with a mother's tears—overcome at last by the deep slumbers of childhood ; but still she weeps, and waits, and watches, and yet he comes not !—thus wasting his substance and imbruting his facul-

ties, until they who called him *father*, shrink from his presence; and she who gave her heart to his keeping, mourns in silence over a husband worse than dead—a husband buried in his pollutions!

On the other hand, the house of mourning tends to check and subdue those very emotions to which the house of feasting so insidiously contributes. How can one plume himself on the insignia of greatness, or on the means of luxurious living, when to enter the house of mourning is sometimes to behold the evidence that neither the honors nor the riches of the world can rescue their possessor from the cold grasp of death? How can he be incited “to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof,” when that body which lust pampered and vanity adorned, and which now lies before him cold and stiff, is about to be consigned to the worms of the dust? How can his heart be lifted up to say, “My might and my power hath gotten me these,” when, in another house of mourning, he beholds a fellow-being once standing higher and more favored than himself, now pining in obscurity and pinched with want; the former owner of a splendid mansion now tenanted by the poor man’s hut? But there, in still another house of mourning, is one who has lain for years on a bed of pain and languishment. For him day brings no sunshine, and night no quiet rest; while each revolving moon serves only to deepen the gloom that settles around his pillow—still mocking the wretched sufferer’s hope of coming death. In another apartment we see the once-admired of all beholders wasting away; no whis-

per of praise is heard ; no knee bends in vows of idolatrous love ; that eye no longer sparkles ; the rose has left the cheek ; the hue of death begins to settle over the once-lovely face. Enter another house, and we may see the once so happy wife and mother kneeling down with her little ones around the death-bed of their father ; or, again, the husband hanging in anguish over his loved one's corpse. But hark ! what sound is that ? 'Tis the wail of the widowed mother, for they have come to bury her only son ! But other sounds pierce the ear as we open the door of another house—sounds like the voices of young hearts just tasting their first cup of woe ! The mother has followed the father to his last home, and the orphans shriek disconsolate.

What an appalling contrast does this house of mourning present to all that ministers to the pride and lusts of the natural heart ! Here is squalid poverty, instead of the luxuries of wealth ; unhonored obscurity, instead of the applauses of the world ; the voice of lamentation and woe, instead of the sound of the viol and the harp ; the sighs of weakness and the groans of pain, instead of feats of strength and peals of merriment ; the piteous tones of early orphanage, instead of the gladsome voices and innocent sports of childhood's home. Alas ! the pale shroud covers the form which fashion had bedecked ; consumption feeds on the face which beauty had graced and pride displayed ; and the spacious hall of pleasure is exchanged for the dark, and narrow, and silent house of death ! Whether it be viewed as the scene of adversity, the chamber of sickness, the place of bereavement, or the couch of death—what a school for humility,

and moderation, and self-denial, this house of mourning!

It is these passions—"the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life"—that deaden our virtuous sensibilities, and encase the heart in the adamant of selfishness. How seldom do we find among the votaries of sense any feeling regard for the sons and daughters of affliction! how seldom have they even a tear to give to misery! how soon do they abandon any one of their number—though they may have often partaken of his festive cheer, and availed themselves of the facilities which his house had afforded for their gratification—the moment he is overtaken by calamity! and how do they shrink from re-entering the house which yesterday was the house of feasting, if to-day it has become the house of death!

But while repressing those feelings to which the house of feasting gives rise, the house of mourning tends to soften the heart, and call forth the sensibilities of our moral nature into lively and effective exercise. Here it is the heart is formed that knows how to feel for others' woes, and even longs to minister relief and comfort; and in a world like this, where there is so much sickness, and sorrow, and death, what a blessing is such a heart—what a welcome visitant within the house of mourning is a kind and sympathizing friend—like an angel of mercy, shedding light and whispering peace! Here the tear of pity must fall, and the heart be opened to every generous and ennobling sentiment. I care not how cold and unfeeling one may be; let him only enter the house of mourning—be it the house where the

couch of lingering sickness has been spread—where the angel of death has entered, breaking in upon the quietness, and breaking up the happiness of that domestic circle—or over which the cold blasts of misfortune have swept, wrecking, as in a night, all that ministered to comfort and hope; let him go and sit down there, silently contemplating what humanity is called to bear, and, if his heart be not moved, that man can have no feeling but for himself: the tie that binds him to a common humanity is severed. A monster of selfishness, he is prepared to cause misery, rather than lessen his own pleasure; he cares not for the wants and woes of others, except so far as either may interfere with the gratification of his own desires. Hence it is that avarice is so detestable a passion, because it kills the heart: it can exact its bond without a sigh from the poor, desolate widow, and snatch the last crumb from the pale lips of the orphan. Hence it is, also, that luxury has no sympathy for suffering humanity, because avarice hides itself under the purple garb, and covets the means of faring sumptuously every day.

But what reflections are these, rising so naturally, as we enter the house of mourning? ‘What if my property should be wrecked, my comforts scattered on the winds, my loves torn from me? Who is it that has made me to differ? why am I placed in such enviable circumstances? The time may come when I shall need all the kindness and sympathy now demanded of me—*must* come, when I too shall bid adieu to earth, and go down to the dark, cold sepulchre.’

And thus it is that the house of mourning induces

serious, salutary thought. We cannot go there without encountering some form amid the various ills to which we ourselves are subject; without being reminded of our dependence, our frailty, our mutability, our mortality; without a renewed conviction of the vanity of the world, the worth of the soul, and the unutterable importance of timely attention to our highest interest.

We may see there a touching exhibition of the power of our blessed religion—how it can sustain one under the pressure of earthly ill, compensate for the absence of worldly comforts, and cheer the heart amid the sorest trials. I have sometimes entered the house of mourning with an embarrassed step, feeling my impotence to assuage the mourner's grief. There dwelt one who but a few days ago was the loved and loving wife—her little ones around her, scarce conscious of their loss, but weeping because their mother wept; yet, amid the tears that fell so fast, there was the rainbow of hope. Sad and desolate as she appeared, she was not alone, nor were her children fatherless. God was with her, fortifying her soul by his faithful word of promise, and warming her heart with the sentiments of renewed devotedness to him, by shedding abroad there the peace-giving and sanctifying influences of his blessed Spirit.

Again, have I approached the bedside of the dying; and while I thought how soon he would take his leave of family and friends, and wing his way to worlds unknown; and as I looked to see his bosom heave, and the tear fall—lo! all was peace, and the dying man passed away rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God!

And, again, I have gone where but lately all was

competency and comfort. How changed the scene! — yet a smile welcomed my approach. Amid the pressure of sudden reverse, I heard the language of sweet submission: “The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” I felt that the peace of God kept their hearts; for, under all the trials of their lot, they poured forth the voice “of prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.” Bitter as may be the voice of lamentation and woe which breaks on the ear as we enter the house of mourning, we may sometimes hear it blended with the notes of thanksgiving and praise! Deep as is the gloom which shrouds that house, it is relieved by a light from heaven!

In other instances, we may behold the *sad want* of religion — in the mourner’s refusal to be comforted; in the murmurings and curses which no considerations can repress; or in the agony and despair pictured in the face of the dying sinner.

But thus it is that the house of mourning, from its resistless appeals to serious thought, and from its not unfrequent association with the sustaining power of true religion, or the deep wretchedness of afflicted worldlings, becomes the place of incipient preparation for the vicissitudes of life, the solemnities of death, and the issues of eternity.

Solomon was right, therefore, in his conclusion — unless there be no higher happiness than such as this world affords; unless the vicissitudes of life be the result of a blind chance, and death the ending of this spiritual being! But who can deliberately take this ground? Let the skeptic brood over his dark thoughts, and the

epicure pursue his fancied good, but sure am I that man was made for some higher purpose than the mere play and revel of the senses. What mean these drooping spirits, these withered sensibilities, these evanescent joys, these dying comforts? How happens it that even a speedy experience of the world so often extorts the mournful testimony—"All is vanity and vexation of spirit?" And why, in the midst of his darling plans—while surrounded by every siren form, and enjoying all the pleasures which the varying combinations of wealth and fancy can secure—does paleness at times steal over his face, and his heart sink and die within him? Worldly happiness is but a dream: our loves, and hopes, and joys, are as delusive as the gilded forms that visit our slumbers during the silence of the night.

Go to the house of mourning, and see the winding up of all the scenes of the house of feasting; see there what a comment God has made on the feast, the song, and the dance; see the evidence that neither the riches, nor the honors, nor the pleasures of the world, can secure man's happiness—that he cannot be miserable who has God for his portion, and that he must be without peace who is without God in the world! Yes; listen to that plaintive voice—'tis the voice of affectionate solicitude: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world."

Hark, again!—a deeper sound breaks on the ear—'tis the funeral knell: "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh."

As the result of his contrasts of life, "the wise man's

heart is in the house of mourning"—there, to improve its lessons, or to sympathize with its inmates. Even while in the house of feasting, he forgets not that the house of mourning is hard by; and thus preserves that seriousness of disposition which is so proper as well as important in a state of things where we are either daily sinning and suffering ourselves, or forced to witness the sins and sufferings of others; and thus, also, amid all the good things of this life, he aims to use the world without thankless elation or immoderate indulgence. As though he should say: 'Time was when I was thoughtless and frivolous, having no feeling separate from the gratification of self—no purpose apart from worldly gains and pleasures. Now, with what different thoughts do I look on the world, and with what higher sentiments do I regard my being! It is a serious thing to live—a yet more serious thing to die! What awaits me I know not, nor would I venture to predict. "Have I received good at the hands of God, and shall I not receive evil?" My house may yet become the house of mourning; but whatever the cup which may be preparing for me, may I cultivate those sentiments of trust and hope in God which will enable me in the hour of trial to say, "The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink of it?" This house, which I call my own, is not my abiding-place. It was erected, in God's good providence, merely to lodge me on my way to eternity. It will ere long become the house of mourning—mourning for me! Let me so walk before my household as to leave behind me the memory of the righteous; so depart, that they whom I leave behind,

mourn not without the hope of ultimately meeting me “in a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens !” ’

But the heart of fools is in the house of mirth ; that is, they think, they dream of pleasure, and all their talk is of what they have enjoyed, or the joys they anticipate. They have no heart but for sport and gayety—for the humorous joke, the amusing story, the lively song, the boon companion—for eating and drinking—blithesome days and merry nights. Pleasure is the end and aim of all their plans and movements ; and thus their way is their folly : this shows them to be devoid of wisdom, because they have left out of account their dependence on God for “life, and breath, and all things ;” because they vainly think that “God will not see nor regard them ;” because they, too, must meet with disappointment, and care, and trouble ; nor can they entirely shut out from view the evils of life, or ward off the fear of death. They, too, must die ! and death may come upon them in the midst of their sinful joys, and find them *unprepared* to meet their God in judgment.

I know that religion wears a melancholy aspect to the earth-bound mind, as if “she were clothed in deep mourning, with a coffin for her writing-desk, and a skull for an inkstand ;” and some of my readers may be inclined to think that, by such a train of reflections, I have only deepened the gloom with which the subject is naturally invested in the view of all “the lovers of pleasure.” Were this the fact, however, it would not lessen its urgent importance, nor render its neglect in any wise the less hazardous. No love of pleasure can obviate its

imperative claims ; nor can one's levity and folly make it a less serious thing to die and face the Judge ! Why should it be a gloomy subject, but because we are in love with sense and sin ? How can it be, unless we are indifferent to God's favor, and averse from our highest good ? What, indeed, is the design of all true religion, but to secure to us deliverance from that gloom which naturally accompanies our thoughts of affliction and death ?—so that we may welcome afflictions as the tokens of a Father's love—welcome crosses as the badges of our heaven-born faith, and even exult in the promise and prospect of a new and endless life !

THE SON OF GOD.

HAD we mingled with the throng around the cross, and witnessed the miraculous phenomena which nature exhibited when “Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost,” in all probability ours would have been the same testimony that burst from the lips of the Roman centurion. But no testimony from nature’s works, nor sign from heaven, is indispensable to the conviction that Jesus is the Son of God : his character indubitably attests the divinity of his origin.

In passing, therefore, from Old-Testament times to the days of Christ and his apostles, it will be necessary, to the more effective prosecution of our object in this work, to delineate his character ; for unless it can be shown that, in one important respect, the past has no parallel in the present, it cannot be proved that He to whom the patriarchs and prophets referred, did come in the flesh ; or that the Christian oracles are of equal authority with the Hebrew Scriptures.

We are aware of the difficulty, and that we may be only exposing ourselves to the charge of presumption. His character should be drawn, as his praise is hymned, by loftier spirits. But, problematical as success may be, we may not desist from the attempt. It is the theme of fond contemplation ; the subject of never-tiring and

instructive study ; the model which imparts sublimity to the humblest purpose that aspires to imitate.

As we turn from the perusal of some of Plutarch's "Lives," pained as we have been by the conviction of defects and weaknesses in the most renowned of mortals, what a relief is afforded to the mind by the memorabilia of Him who was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners!" When the heart is oppressed by the various revolting aspects that pervade the whole field of human character, how delightful to repose the eye on the only spot that, by the freshness and depth of its verdure, so amply compensates for the dreariness of the moral waste ! When, too, the indefinite and abstract lineaments of philosophic virtue fail to attract and animate, how does the character of Jesus, embodied as it is in living, natural representation, tend to warm and to quicken, while it guides the spirit that is in man to the source and centre of all perfection !

The Jews, at the period we contemplate, had lost both their purity and their freedom. In the grossness of their views, they overlooked the spiritual design of their institutions, and regarded the Messiah of their prophecies and promises as a temporal deliverer. They had often been conquered, and as often the God of their fathers had achieved their freedom by some chosen servant : and now, though again enslaved, and that to a nation whose wings overspread the world, yet the experience of the past taught them not to despair ; while the recorded predictions of ancient prophets imparted to their bosoms the life and vigor of a hope that upheld them in their degradation, and consoled them in their miseries.

The fulness of time had come : expectation was at its height. Imagination had gathered around the coming Messiah the insignia of royalty, the splendors of greatness, and the terrors of military conquest. Ambition beheld Judea already rising from the dust of her thralldom, slaking her revenge in the blood of her foes, advancing over all opposition, and triumphantly assuming the dominion of the world.

During this their state of feverish preparation, a remarkable star appeared, attracting the notice of certain eastern sages, and guiding them, in their search for the new-born king of the Jews, to the town of Bethlehem. But what was there in the condition of the infant Jesus to betoken so high a destiny ? Yet he claimed, on arriving at manhood, the character of the long-expected Messiah. True, he was not the only one who made such an extraordinary claim. No time could have been more favorable to ambitious pretensions : it needed but shrewdness enough to discern the signs of the times, and adroitness enough to adapt one's appearance and movements to the views and wishes of the people, to secure their credence and enlist their aid.

Hence impostors arose in succession, each aiming to establish and exalt himself by succumbing to the national sentiment, and flattering vulgar prejudices ; and thus insuring their ultimate defeat, by the very means which infatuated both them and their followers with the hope of speedy success. But what could have been so contrary to their preconceptions of the Messiah as the character which Jesus presented—so fraught with disappointment to all their fondly-cherished hopes, as the

sentiments which he avowed? Instead of an heroic leader, he was a spiritual teacher; instead of a warrior, a peace-maker; instead of having the trappings of regal dignity, and the ostentatious appendages of proud greatness, he seemed a meek and lowly man: and, so far from identifying himself with the cause of his country, though she was sighing for deliverance from the Roman yoke, he assumed the unwonted position—"My kingdom is not of this world." The Jew had no thought of duty beyond the limits of his own land, and no ideas of greatness separate from the wonted earth-born schemes of territorial conquest and military renown: but Jesus looked out from his obscure birthplace, to survey the dark regions of the earth; and, in view of the nations which had been so long enslaved to error, and enveloped in the darkness of a moral night, declared himself to be *the light of the world!*

Alexander sighed for more worlds to conquer, and many a Cæsar has madly aimed to wield the sceptre of universal dominion. Napoleon even aspired to fill all the thrones of Europe with kings bearing his own name: but ambition, amid its brightest visions of glory, had never dreamed of undermining the consolidated opinions of ages, and of converting the world into a spiritual temple.

Firm in the belief of national deities, the Gentile doubted neither the reality nor the sufficiency of his country's religion, nor thought it applicable to the condition of any other people. Hence, when the oracle at Delphi was asked, "what rites or worship were most acceptable to the gods," the answer was, "Those which

are legally established in each city." Thus, an acknowledged principle of mutual toleration secured the religious concord of the Gentile world; while the Jews were restrained from interference by the haughtiness of their national sentiments. In their view, all heathen nations were unworthy of notice; and if on no condition they would admit within the sacred precincts of the Mount the idolater's unhallowed foot, much less would they think of abolishing their ritual, and demolishing their temple, in order to establish a religion in which the Gentile would be their equal—alike the children of the same God, and the heirs of a common inheritance.

In all these respects, however, Jesus, though born a Jew, betrayed no sympathy with the Jewish mind. Though reared amid those influences of humble life which naturally incline the youthful mind to imbibe impressions from without, and to defer to existing authority, yet was he independent in his views, and thought for himself but to disdain compliance with Jewish prejudices, and mortify the pride of national ambition. Without intercourse with the learned, or access to books—without either riches or patronage—he formed a scheme as sublime as it was new: that of delivering the world from the bondage of sin and error, and uniting all nations in the bonds of a common faith and hope—even faith in his mission, and hope in his salvation! Truly, the most obscure rustic might as readily, and, to all human view, as reasonably, have thought of uprooting the everlasting hills, or of changing the tides of the ocean.

So foreign from the mental views of that period was the conception of a new and universal religion, that even they who regarded Christ as the Messiah were slow to comprehend the nature of his kingdom; nor did they at the close of his ministry fully take in the grand idea which his gospel unfolds. His mighty works might disarm skepticism; but, original and sublime as was his purpose, it could not overcome the blinding power of bigotry. Multitudes might throng his presence, and not a few attach themselves to his person; still, in his freedom from all local views and temporary suggestions—in his superiority to the spirit which breathed through the looks and words of his countrymen—he was alone—as it were a solitary being, dwelling in his own high thoughts and solemn purposes; neither daunted by the opposition of his enemies, nor discouraged by the dulness of his followers; under all circumstances retaining the consciousness which from the first he evinced, of sustaining a peculiar relation to both God and man: hence, speaking as never man spoke—without either arrogance or diffidence, affectation or precipitance—calmly, yet decidedly; concisely, yet explicitly—his every word and action betokening a mission of vast import, an object without a parallel.

As he had no human sympathy in his mysterious sorrows, so he took counsel with no one; and though all his acts resulted from his own unaided thoughts, yet was he never necessitated to recall or undo any thing he had once said or done. Avoiding no searching suspicion, answering every incredulous inquiry, oftentimes anticipating the expression of human thought—always

uttering his views without deliberation or hesitancy, and, under all circumstances, acting out his irrepressible convictions of duty,—he placed the truth of what he said on authority, and left his deeds to speak for themselves. Before the light of heaven, and in the face of the world, he laid legitimate claim to the Messiahship: “If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins.”

It is natural to think that nothing of moment can be achieved without the patronage of authority or the aid of wealth: hence, in all human projects, the countenance of rulers is solicited, or pecuniary means are collected; while the influence of rank and fashion is indispensable to the spread of any corrupt form of religion. This is the well-known policy of the world, and, where-soever or by whomsoever adopted, it designates the man and the movement to be of the world. But Jesus, though his friends were confined to the illiterate and obscure, did neither court the favor nor fear the influence of the great. There is no instance of that fawning deference to pomp and power which invariably characterizes men of sinister aims; yet there is no evidence that he ever faltered in his purpose, or fainted under discouragement. Bold and stupendous as was his design, he looked forward to its accomplishment with a confidence which nothing short of actual prescience could inspire or justify. Bigotry, in all its heartless and dark projects—infidelity, in all its envenomed and ruthless forms, would be arrayed against his claims; but his right to reign king of the Jews would be only the more apparent and the more generally admitted. The powers of thrones, the intellectual and moral habits of the

world, would be called forth in opposition to his design, only to be defeated with signal overthrow. His own reputation would be assailed, his motives impeached, his friends scattered like sheep; nay, his own life must be sacrificed: but that gospel of his would go on *conquering and to conquer!* All this he distinctly foresaw; and, instead of holding out to his disciples any prospect of worldly grandeur, or even a promise of exemption from worldly ill, he gave them to understand what would be the consequences to themselves of adherence to his person; how they would be hated of all men for his sake—persecuted and put to death. Scrutinize his course as we may, we shall look in vain for any of the arts by which impostors invariably aim to delude the multitude, or for any of those motives by which men engaged in a forlorn cause contrive to sustain, if not their own, at least the spirit of their followers. He foretells, nay, calmly depicts those acts of violence which, to all human view, were to frustrate his plans—involving his disciples with himself in infamy and ruin! ‘There, on yonder hill, is the cross erected for Him whom you regard as your Messiah!—that, the ignominious and accursed death which I am doomed to suffer; but my death will be the life of the world. “The Son of man must be crucified and slain, but the third day he shall rise again.”’

Thus, in his allusions to the tragic scenes of Calvary, he showed in only a more striking light that neither the powers of earth nor of hell could shake his purpose, or impair his confidence in the ultimate triumph of his cause. It was this, which, in despite of the treachery

of friends, the malice of enemies, the ingratitude of those whom he had blessed, bore him on toward his object; this, which, amid the humiliating scenes of his trial, imparted to his character an unparalleled degree of moral elevation.

But if, from these views of the Messiahship of Christ, we turn to other aspects of his history, we shall perceive the same striking contrariety to the temper of his times.

No feelings were more common to both the Jew and the Gentile than pride and vanity. That greatness which is founded in humbleness of mind, and rises in proportion to self-abasement, was as remote from the conceptions of either as from their character. Without a suspicion of its flagrant inconsistency with man's condition and relations, pride was universally indulged; while, in the wide-spread deference that was paid to rank and riches, to intellect and learning, to strength and beauty, public opinion sanctioned the exhibition of vanity. But wherein did Jesus betray any indications of this spirit, or any sympathy with its gratified indulgence? It was reserved for him to unfold an example of humility such as the world had never seen nor imagined, and that, under circumstances which, we had almost said, might have justified emotions of pride. Announced to the world in the songs of angels—as the subject of prophecy, the antitype of institutions, and of a long succession of illustrious personages; receiving homage from the loftiest spirits, and proclaimed the beloved Son of God by a voice from heaven; possessing wisdom more profound than ever man attained, and power which controlled the elements—*who* but Christ,

might be excused in entertaining lofty sentiments of himself, or in assuming a superior bearing among men? yet who was ever further removed from vainglory, or so devoid of all feelings allied to self-complacent exultation?

He rose from the poorest condition, yet was he not uplifted. Hosannas greeted his approach, and garments were strewed along his pathway; but the momentary applause of the multitude wrought no change in his demeanor. Still he trode life's lowliest walks, and associated with the children of poverty and sorrow.

The same modesty and simplicity characterized his manners and address, with the same freedom from arrogance and ostentation that adorned the wisdom of his teachings. Studiously avoiding both personal display and worldly honors, he dwelt in a despised place—refused to be called Master—rejected the flattery when he was called “good”—and even commanded his deeds of mercy to be kept secret. When sought by his countrymen, that they might place him on a throne, he retired to the desert. Where any one else would have been intensely anxious—painfully awake to the sound of approaching footsteps—he “laid aside his garment, girded himself with a towel, and washed his disciples' feet.” Even when condemned at the bar of the Sanhedrim, he voluntarily submitted to the humiliating sentence!

His meekness, too, is equally remarkable. Vindictive sentiments, still so prevalent, were more than sanctioned—were applauded—at the period of the Messiah. “An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,” was one

of the traditionary maxims of the Jews ; while the Gentile could not refrain from cherishing a motive of action which eloquence had emblazoned and religion deified.

But behold the Moralist and Reformer of the world ! Not only did he enjoin, and that on peculiar grounds, the duties of kindness, forbearance, and forgiveness — he exemplified these principles of his religion amid the severest trials to which humanity is subject. Oppressed by the vilest ingratitude, loaded with the most wanton abuse, he nevertheless bore all with unruffled meekness. Though his character was defamed, his actions perverted, and his words misconstrued, the malice of his enemies served but to reflect in a stronger light his superiority to insult and injury ; for “ when he was reviled, he reviled not again, and when he suffered he threatened not.”

He is exposed to the contradiction of sinners, calumniated as a wine-bibber, a sabbath-breaker, a madman — he is even denounced as a devil ! How eager they are to cast him down from yonder precipice ! even his brethren reject him — he has not where to lay his head ! But all this was suffered without murmuring or despondency. On no occasion can we detect any sign of resentment, or overhear any reproachful or unkind expression. Even amid the mockings and buffetings of his persecutors, he opened not his mouth : and, when stretched in agony upon the ignominious cross, he prayed for the forgiveness of his murderers ; and imparted to a wretched malefactor, who was crucified by his side, an assurance of pardoned sin and immortal glory !

Should it be asked what, in a word, was the essential and peculiar element of Christ's character, we answer, *benevolence*—full, free, disinterested, and immutable! This pre-eminently distinguished him from the best of his age and nation. It was such as the world had never seen, nor will ever see, unless Christ himself should again appear in the flesh. Not that the virtue of benevolence was then unknown or neglected; but it was restrained and depressed by partial and contracted notions. There were the recognised offices of kin, of friendship, and of patriotism; and there had been among different people occasional instances of warm and devoted friendship, and self-sacrificing patriotism; but all such instances, though emblazoned on the page of history, fade away before the resplendent lustre of Christ's generous spirit, shining as it did through his every sentiment and action, and irradiating as with a sunbeam man's relations and duties to his neighbor. Without reference to the distinctions of country, of rank, of relationship, or of friendship, he went about doing good. Neither Jew nor Gentile as such, but *as man*, was the object of his love: the hated Samaritan, no less than the contemptuous Judean; the despised publican as well as the proud Pharisee—not the remotest stranger was disregarded, nor the bitterest enemy excluded—embracing as his love did all the members, respecting as his mission did all the interests of the human race.

Hence, though born in the most bigoted age of the most bigoted nation, he never imbibed a prejudice nor entertained an illiberal sentiment. Inflexible in his attachment to the great principles of morality and of piety,

but as far removed from the blinding influence of selfish passion as from the contractedness of ignorance—when did he ever show any bigoted regard to the doctrines of his nation, or to the peculiarities of a sect? What sentiment did he either embrace or reject, because it had been received or opposed by the people? So far from public opinion having led him to adopt any custom it sanctioned, even its denunciations could not deter him from practices which he deemed innocent. Godlike benevolence at once impelled and enabled him to withstand the narrow spirit of his nation, and to do good unto all men without partiality. To this, the gracious character of his miracles bears resistless testimony. Whose eyes were not opened, whose leprosy was not cleansed—though he might have been either a friend or a foe, a scribe or a Pharisee, a Jew or Samaritan? He wrought miracles in behalf of some whose enmity he knew would continue to the last with undiminished virulence.

Malicious as was the opposition he encountered, he did not desist. Keen as was the ingratitude he daily experienced, he was not overcome—ever moving on his undisturbed way, like the sun amid encompassing clouds and raging tempests.

When he approached the city whose ingratitude had been perpetuated in the names of its slaughtered prophets, and now was doubly enhanced by the disbelief of his own mighty works—the injuries which it had heaped on him, and the means which it was devising to deprive him of his life—he forgot his own danger, so absorbed was he in its approaching destruction: he

even wept over the guilty, abandoned spot, and cried with inexpressible tenderness : “ O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee ; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings ; and ye would not ! ” On another occasion, when he looked out on the multitude, “ he had compassion on them, because they were scattered, and were as sheep without a shepherd. ” On entering the gate of Nain, he met the funeral of a “ young man, who was the only son of his mother, and she a widow. ” Jesus was moved to compassion, and said unto her, “ Weep not. ” He resuscitated the young man, and delivered him back to his mother. Nay, while he himself was expiring amid the agonies of crucifixion, he forgot not the distress and desolate situation of his mother, and made provision for her protection and support. Can the records of history present an example of such benevolence ?

He came to restore in man the lost image of his God — to diffuse universal happiness, by inculcating the principles of a pure and peaceful religion. Whatever objections might be urged against the nature of his authoritative requirements, it must be admitted that he had no private end to answer : this is demonstrable by his impartial censures and commendations ; by the boldness and sincerity of his reproofs ; by his plain, unambiguous speech, equally remote from either servile flattery or sinister reserve. When did he hesitate to arraign the vices and expose the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees ? or when did he fail to rebuke the faithless-

ness of his disciples? If he failed not to expose the errors of his foes, he overlooked not the weaknesses and faults of his friends; if severe on the former, it was because he was just to the latter. Insensible to the praise of man, he betrayed no dread of popular odium. What to him was the world's applause or obloquy, compared to the interests of the lost whom he came to seek and to save? Neither coveting popular favor nor dreading the world's frowns, he declared the truth, not in one manner to his friends and in another to his enemies, but alike to both, as to rational and immortal beings, amenable to the Judge of quick and dead.

Bent on accomplishing his beneficent errand, though it might lead him through toils and trials, not even the most appalling dangers could shake his constancy. Wonderful to relate, he came to live and to die for his enemies! Yes; and he did die, as he had lived, for his enemies! This is the finishing stroke in the character of our blessed Lord: it places the crown on his head. Could we detect the faintest trace of selfishness, how would it mar the beauty of his aspect, and dim the glory of his cross!

We might advert to other traits; for he united in himself every possible excellence, and each in the highest degree. It was this union of seemingly irreconcilable but essentially harmonious qualities that constituted the singular perfection of his virtue. In humanity, the stronger virtues are seldom without austerity, and the softer seldom without feebleness; while no man ever embodied in himself the active with the contemplative virtues, and the heroic with the tender. As we explore

the records of the past, various characters rise up, and in turn challenge our admiration for their noble qualities or amiable sentiments; it may be, our reverence for their love of truth and adherence to right—the triumphs of principle, or the flights of piety: but look where we may, we find *but one Jesus!* In him, there is no approach to any of those infirmities, inconsistencies, or defects that impair the force, mar the symmetry, and betray the incompleteness of all human virtue.

His spirituality did not preclude his intercourse with the world, nor did his love of retirement interfere with his duties to society. If he spoke of great things, it was with ease and simplicity. If he condescended to mingle with sinners in the market-place, or to sit at meat with publicans, it was with purity and dignity. Zealous without rashness, so was he prudent without timidity. Indignant at sin, he yet could compassionate the sinner. Ardent in his feelings, he ever maintained self-possession. Intent with unmitigated urgency on the great errand of his life, yet no opposition perturbed the tranquillity of his mind. Still more remarkable—expansive as was his benevolence, it did not impair the force of his private ties; nor was the authority which he claimed as the Saviour of men, at variance with the love and obedience which he owed as a son. How many miracles did he perform for the supply of others' wants, yet not one for his own! How superior was he to the interests and pleasures of the world, yet gentle in manners, and free from austerity! How exposed on every hand to the strongest temptations, yet continently keeping himself “unspotted from the world!”

The sole reason of that hatred which he ceaselessly encountered was, the disappointment of Jewish ambition; and the only charge which his nation preferred against him was, his prophecy respecting the speedy destruction of their temple and state. He led a life of toil, privation, and suffering, without a murmur; he submitted to a death of shame, desertion, and agony, without a struggle. Nailed to the ignominious tree, his last breath was sublime mercy!

To whom shall we liken him? What philosopher has equalled the sublimity of his maxims, or the profundity of his wisdom? What moralist has laid so deep the foundations of virtue, or reared so high the standard of morals? What legislator has spoken to every heart, in a single line, adapted to every class and every clime?

Compared with Jesus, are not the Zenos of antiquity impure and debased? were not their priests licentious and tyrannical, and their philanthropists selfish and contracted? Yea, in comparison with Jesus, we may not except even Moses; much less Zoroaster or Pythagoras.

Whose religion is so spiritual in its nature — so intelligible and reasonable in its principles — so benign in its tendency? And where is the sage who could so live and so die, without weakness and without ostentation? “Truly this was the Son of God!”

How else can we account for his character? Is it not inexplicable by any principle of human nature? As an effect, it must have had some adequate cause; and where shall we find such a cause but in an agency superior to man's?

There have been those whom the world with one accord has denominated *good*, and through all coming ages will eulogize as *great*; but if they cannot stand in comparison with Jesus, could he have been an insane enthusiast, an ambitious sectary, or an arrant impostor? It is impossible for human nature in its present lapsed state to attain the perfection or rival the example which Christ exhibited. Could he, then, have been no more than an earth-born man?

To say that this character never had an embodied representation, were not only to do violence to all the laws of testimony, but to involve us in the greater difficulty of attempting to account for its imaginary existence. How came these fishermen of Galilee to delineate such a character, if Jesus Christ never lived? Whence did they gather suitable material for a mythical representation? where obtain their model? Hea-then antiquity, amid the multitude of its illustrious men and imperishable records, presented none. Hea-then philosophy, notwithstanding its repeated efforts to paint human perfection, failed miserably; and even now, unless clandestinely availing itself of the light of Revelation, infidelity, in its representations of wisdom and virtue, stamps but an image of its own deformity. Nor in their conceptions could the evangelists have been aided by their own Scriptures: they record no faultless character; and even the combined excellencies of all the Old-Testament worthies could not afford material for the fabrication of such a history as this of Christ.

How is it possible, then, that in an age of moral darkness, these unlettered men should have invented a char-

acter which has defied the scrutiny of malice ; which constantly unfolds greater excellence and beauty in proportion to the expansion and refinement of our moral sentiments ; which cannot be surpassed in the utmost reach of our conceptions ! Such delicacy of moral sentiment as they must have had who drew this character, whether it be real or not, seems not very consistent with a deliberate attempt to palm a lie on mankind. Impositors originate the idea of the most exalted character that ever existed upon earth ? Tell us, ye who boast of reason and of common sense, which lays himself the more open to the charge of credulity—the Christian, or the infidel ?

On the supposition, however, that this perfect character had been represented in general description, or loose and indefinite panegyric, we might with philosophic propriety refer its origin to the inspiration of genius : but that four persons, though respectively writing at the interval of years, should retain the same recollections, and unite in the same views of this character ; that they should exhibit him to whom it is ascribed in different relations, amid friends and foes, in public and in private—amid alternate scenes of quiet and trial—in conversation by turns with the rich and the poor, the high and the low, and on as great a diversity of subjects ; yet, that they should be guilty of no inconsistency, no appearance of effort, of concealment, or of exaggeration—presenting a plain, frank, unartistic narrative, and preserving through all its varied scenes this same Jesus acting on the same principles, with reference to the same ends, at all times, in every situation, from the beginning

to the aid of his ministry ; in short, that four persons — no matter what their motive — unless they were penetrated by the conviction of having seen the Lord, — should have collusively united to frame such a narrative as this, is more incredible, a thousand times more inconceivable, than that *Christ himself* should have furnished the subject of it. In fact, the evangelical narratives, in their various and distinct yet harmonious features, bear marks of genuineness and authenticity so striking and inimitable, that, if fictitious, the inventor, as even Rousseau admitted, “ would be a more astonishing character than the hero.”

Should we now institute an inquisition respecting the motives of the evangelists, it would be impossible to detect any that could have led them to fabricate such a record as that with which they have furnished us. To suppose that it might have been fictitious, is only to subject ourselves to the impracticable task of accounting for the fact of its having been received as true, when there was every facility for the detection of a fraud, and the strongest possible motives for exposing any duplicity. The simple ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s supper are confirmation strong — imperishable monuments — of both the fact and the design of Christ’s advent.

His character, therefore, constitutes an argument of resistless force in favor of our holy religion ; or, to say the least, one of equal weight with physical evidence. Let Hume vaunt himself on his philosophic acumen, and Gibbon declaim on the efficiency of second causes ; — though it were possible to set aside the argument from miracles, by opposing experience to testimony ; and that from the prophecies, by impeaching their dates,

or resolving them into shrewd conjectures—still, the *character of Jesus* will furnish a position which no ingenuity can undermine, no reasoning invalidate, no prejudice mistake. It stamps on Christianity the resplendent signet of Divinity. It re-echoes in Reason's ear the very voice that broke through the overshadowing cloud on the Mount of Transfiguration—"This is my beloved Son: *hear him!*"

We are aware of the tendency of certain schools of philosophy to deify humanity: but he who can contemplate the loveliness of Christ's spotless virtue; dwell on his weighty sayings, or listen to his tones of mingled softness and majesty; see the dead man come forth from the grave at his bidding, or hear him by a word hush the winds and waves into silence; hear him, too, proclaim forgiveness of sin, and testify his right by commanding the palsied sick to take up their bed and walk: who can witness his sympathy for the afflicted, and his own unruffled calmness amid insults and injuries; follow him through the closing scenes of his sufferings, and behold his meek submission, his magnanimity, his good-will to his enemies; stand by, while, in accomplishment of his own prediction, he bursts the bands of death—and hear him, as he ascends from earth to the glory which he had with the Father before the world was, challenging to himself the attributes of final Judge, and the sceptre of unlimited rule: he who can see and hear all this, yet discover in him no glimpse of Incarnate Deity—nothing above the utmost capabilities of man's nature—must indeed be hopelessly prejudiced or wilfully stupid. The rays of the sun might pierce

the blind man's lids, but the blindness of such a mind is incurable.

We are aware, too, of the proneness of fanatics to magnify their object and exaggerate its importance, until their leader, dismissing the humility of a follower of Christ, complacently regards himself, as he is called, the Jesus Christ of the age! But if we are shocked at the impiety of all such pretensions, we can hardly be less amazed at the ignorance which the pretenders themselves betray. To deny the historic reality of such a person as Jesus of Nazareth; to regard his mission as simply the natural development of a great idea; or to resolve his teachings and doings into a series of myths—does, indeed, show how easily philosophy, falsely so called, may unhinge the mind, as infidelity always corrupts and petrifies the heart: but to arrogate to one's self the character and mission of Christ, only proves that fanaticism may craze the brain as well as sear the conscience. Astounding presumption! reckless, incorrigible folly!

Look at the Author and Finisher of our faith! Infidelity may vent its foul aspersions, or brood in secret over its dark thoughts; but, though Argus-eyed in its malignity, it can discover not even a defect, much less a fault, in his character. Embodying the greatest moral strength with the most uniform and consistent virtue, a more perfect model defies conception. His meekness, his purity, his benevolence—his firmness and strength of purpose—and at the same time the lofty and “before untrodden range of his intellect”—present him to us as the GREAT and GOOD without a parallel among mortals.

Yet in one sense we may see even Christ himself in the present : for whatever is good in the present is strictly referable to the light of his teaching, to the peculiar excellence of his example, and to the fervor and force of his disinterested love ; and wherever men are engaged in doing good with an eye single to God's glory, there he is present, by his word and Spirit, to sustain, and cheer, and prosper the work of their hands ; and whenever two or three meet together in his name, there is he to bless them with his life-giving, peace-speaking presence ; and whenever and wherever his ambassadors proclaim his messages of love and mercy to dying men, he is with them, and will be with them "even to the end of the world."

They who consult the oracles of worldly wisdom may question the truth of the evangelic records, or regard Christ as no more than a prophet sent of God, or even degrade him to a level with themselves : but he who listens to the responses from the sacred oracles, will be taught to acknowledge and adore him as "the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person ;" for it is written that "all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father." He will even be taught to welcome and rely on Christ as the Lord his righteousness, as well as his sacrifice for sin ; since it is written that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in God's sight." Nor will his own renunciation of all self-righteousness at the foot of the cross render him less desirous of "cleansing himself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit," or less zealous "in every good word and work." No ; the answer to all

our inquiries at the oracles of God respecting Christian character and hope is one and the same : "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

Oh ! it is not that all evidences of a Divine mission, and of a glorious salvation from the guilt and power of sin, do not cluster around the person of Christ Jesus, that so many reject his claims :* it is rather that so few who profess to regard him as the Son of God, breathe his spirit, and imitate his example.

* Different writers have adverted to Christ's character as conclusive proof of the truth of his mission ; but none have presented the argument in a clearer light than a late Unitarian divine, to whose "Discourse" the author is indebted for some important suggestions. The wonder is, that he had not perceived the conclusion to which his own reasoning tends. "As an effect," he says, "it must have had an adequate cause;" and simply "to refer the character of Jesus to a mission from the Father," is not an adequate cause. This were sufficient to account for the character of a Moses, or a Paul ; but not for one who embodied in himself the perfections of Deity. On the supposition that a Divine being had assumed our nature, it is impossible to conceive in what respect he could have transcended in excellence Christ himself. If "his character can be explained by nothing around him," it becomes a question whether the principle of his existence was physically derived from Adam. The evangelists distinctly intimate that the principle of personality and individual existence, in the Son of the Virgin, was union with the uncreated Word ; and therefore we do injustice to his history, if, in attempting to account for "his singular eminence of goodness," we overlook the *fact* of his miraculous conception ; while this fact evidently implies some higher purpose than simply a mission from the Father to instruct men, as it necessarily involves the idea of two entire, distinct natures in one person. The evangelists, in their narratives, were consistent with their own view of Christ — as "Emmanuel" — *God with us* ; but an Unitarian in deducing the truth of Christianity from the character of its Founder, must needs be inconsistent with his own theory as to the nature of Christ. (See "Discourses," &c., by W. E. Channing ; page 349.)

THE INFIDEL JEWS.

AMONG the innumerable evidences of Christ's mission, the fact that he was rejected only by those who were false to Moses, furnishes one which, though not at once obvious, is, on reflection, not the less conclusive. An impostor may be a dogmatist, but no impostor ever invited scrutiny or challenged skepticism; much less would an impostor have ventured to refer a whole people to the archives of their nation in attestation of his claims—fearlessly appealing to the actual founder of their religion in final confirmation of the divinity of his own mission.

An impostor might have availed himself of that general expectation which pervaded the Jewish mind, of a coming Messiah; and, though he might have deceived some by flattering their prejudices and ministering to their passions, he must have failed in any attempt to make his character and actions answer to prophetic description, or accord with the Mosaic writings. Hence, all false Christs—for such did appear—were detected and exposed; but the more the claims of Jesus Christ were investigated, the stronger became the conviction that he was the Messiah who should come.

To whom could the original promise of a Saviour have referred, if not to him who, though born of a

woman, was “the brightness of the Father’s glory, and the express image of his person?” To whom could all the sacrifices of the Mosaic dispensation have pointed, if not to him who should “take away sin by the sacrifice of himself?” In whom could the prophecies have met their fulfilment, if not in him who “came unto his own, and whom his own received not”—and who “was led as a lamb to the slaughter?” Who could have been “the end of the law for righteousness,” if not he who “was made under the law, yet without sin”—who fulfilled the violated law, and made it honorable? And who could have furnished such an illustrious antitype of the Jewish legislator, as he who, like Moses, was miraculously preserved in his infancy; who fasted forty days in the wilderness, as Moses did on the Mount; who in an especial manner enjoyed intercourse with his heavenly Father, as Moses conversed with God face to face; who appeared as a mediator between God and man, as Moses stood in the gap; and who, even as the lawgiver and liberator of the Israelites, appeared with supreme power to save his people from their sins, to liberate them from the bondage of Satan, to open to them a way through the grave, and conduct them safe to the heavenly Canaan?

By consulting the eighteenth chapter of Deuteronomy, where the prophecy is recorded, the reader may perceive that Moses distinctly referred to a great prophet who was destined to succeed him, and whose office it would be to establish a more spiritual religion; that he describes him as a lawgiver who should promulge a new law; that he furnished the Jews with a test by which

they might distinguish the Messiah from a false prophet ; that none of the prophets ever pretended to such a commission as Moses prophetically ascribed to Christ ; and that, if Christ be not the person to whom Moses referred, the Messiah has not yet come.

But if Moses did foretell the coming of the Messiah—one who was to dissolve the ancient Levitical covenant, and usher in a new and spiritual dispensation ; and if, in every respect, Jesus Christ answered to his prophetic description, as well as to the descriptions of other prophets sent of God ; if the evidences of his Messiahship were so palpable, even in his birth and boyhood, that the aged Simeon could exclaim, “Now, Lord, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation”—why did so many, who called themselves Israelites, not believe on him ? Why did they hold out to the last, not only against the proofs furnished by the Old-Testament writers, but against the more obtrusive evidence furnished by his own word and works ?

Shall we say that, though they knew Moses referred to a coming Messiah, prejudice blinded their eyes against Christ ? This is not improbable. There was nothing in Christ’s external appearance to prepossess them in favor of his Messiahship, while there was much in his discourses to call forth their dislike. It was natural for them, therefore, to prejudge and condemn, just as in after-times his gospel was not unfrequently rejected, from sentiments of aversion and contempt, prior to examination.

Neither is it improbable, in the event of their having

been convinced, from a comparison of the prophetic writings with the character of Christ's mission, or from hearing his teachings and witnessing his works, that the pride of their hearts might have led them to stand out against his claims. Instead of one who, according to their expectations, was to appear in regal pomp, Jesus was a meek and lowly man. Instead of one whom they fondly dreamed would lead them on to victory and to national greatness, Jesus was a peacemaker—opposing all their cherished hopes, and mortifying all their lofty aspirations; a man also who, instead of courting the society of the rich and the powerful, and deferring to the sentiments of the Rabbis, rebuked the vices of the former, and exposed the hypocrisy of the latter, while he himself associated with publicans and sinners; a man without any worldly advantages, whether of riches, rank, or education; whose parentage they knew to be obscure, and whose birthplace was a despised city. ‘Surely, he cannot be the Messiah—we will not believe it;’ and the opinion, once expressed, might have remained, whatever their subsequent convictions to the contrary.

It is in no other way that we can account for the infidelity of some at the present day. Their objections have been answered, and they are unable to meet the arguments with which Christianity urges its claims. Whence, then, their unbelief, unless it arises from the obstinacy of their wills—their proud reluctance to submit to the humiliating requisitions of the gospel?—So have I seen a man refusing to admit the truth of a doctrine, not because he could fairly answer the argument in its favor, but because it clashed with the pride of

opinion, or interfered with some selfish interest. It is thus that the Romanist refuses to admit the sufficiency of Scripture ; that the imitator of Romanists continues to reiterate his untenable positions ; that the Socinian denies the divinity of Christ, and the Universalist the future punishment of the wicked. Of what avail any arguments in favor of the truth, when pride is doing battle for self, or the lusts of the flesh beclouding the judgment? As well expect liberality in a miser, or honesty in a knave, as an acknowledgment of error from one whose selfishness is arrayed against the truth. This is a well-known feature of human nature, and may serve to explain the persistive unbelief of the Jews.

But this is not the reason which Christ assigns : “ Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me.” What, when they called themselves his followers, and even rejected Christ for the sake of Moses, did they nevertheless not believe in him? This is a serious charge, and, unless it be established, there is no force in our Saviour’s conclusion. True, Jesus Christ knew what is in man ; and this should satisfy us as to the Jews’ infidelity in Moses : but the observant mind may always gather, from among the various incidents of our Saviour’s life, some conclusive though undesigned evidence of his actual power to read the heart. Thus, it appears that he knew the character of the woman whom he met at the well of Jacob ; he knew the design of the woman who touched the hem of his garment ; he knew that Peter would deny, and that Judas would betray him : and, in like manner, may we ascertain, from a variety of circum-

stances, that he was not mistaken in his conclusion respecting those who rejected his Messiahship.

At the time of our Saviour's advent, there were three prominent sects among the Jews—the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and the Essenes—each of which had their respective leaders, and between which there existed, on some points, the greatest contrariety of opinion. All, however, professed to regard the Mosaic institutes with reverence; yet alike made void the law through their traditions, “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” Among the Athenians, too, there were different schools of philosophy; and, though each observed an ostensible deference to the popular mythology, we know that the sentiments which they advanced were oftentimes incompatible with belief in the pagan oracles, and tended to unsettle the popular faith. There is, indeed, no parallel between the pagan and Jewish oracles; but this skepticism of the heathen philosophers serves to illustrate a fact in the history of human nature—that whenever men become associated for the purpose of speculating on moral and religious subjects, though they may have previously acknowledged some creed, a preference is insensibly given to their own excogitations and deductions: their own views become distinctive, and at last the founder of their school or sect is looked up to with reverence, deferred to with willing submissiveness, and adhered to with arrant bigotry. It is the tendency of human nature, as time modifies our mental associations, and changing circumstances induce a diversity of selfish interests, either to separate into different and conflicting parties, or to depart from original principles. What

government has not in some respects changed from its original form? What institution has not, at some period of its history, deviated from the intentions of its founders? Thus it happened that the church of Rome became false to the form and doctrine of primitive Christianity, and that the church of England has departed from the Calvinistic sentiments of her reformers. Is it not a fact, that, in the estimation of a papist, the church is paramount in authority to the Bible; that the patristic writings have more weight with an ecclesiastic than the Acts of the Apostles, or the epistles of St. Paul; that Revelation is of no account with many compared with the authority of Ignatius, the visions of Swedenborg, or the rationalism of Socinus?

It is far from improbable, then, that there were among the Jews not a few who cared not for Moses any further than his institutes could be made to subserve the interests of their own sect—who, in his name, and under the garb of his authority, advanced their own notions and furthered their own ends. While contending for their own traditions, and while enforcing their own dogmas, they might, like some of our modern traditionists, have denounced all who dissented from them as infidels; have devoutly thought that they were doing God service; and, while all for themselves, that they were all for Moses!

Certain it is, they did not obey the law of Moses: "They paid tithe of mint, anise, and cumin, but neglected the weightier matters of the law." Though, in some instances, guilty of all ungodliness and unrighteousness, they contrived by their ostentatious ablutions, fastings, almsgiving, and prayers, to impress the general

mind with an idea of their superior sanctity : just as the monks contrived to be regarded by the people as paragons of virtue and saints in devotion, while in their retirement from public view they wrought all uncleanness with greediness : or such men as Tetzels and Ecks, who were loud in their denunciations of infidels, and unrelenting in their persecution of heretics, and yet among the foremost in every deed of darkness—not hesitating even to burn the word of God ! Such, indeed, is the case with every man who puts on religion as a cloak for either his ambitious or covetous designs. When virtue degenerates into asceticism, and religion becomes sanctimonious, and zeal is expended in behalf of rites and forms rather than against sin and Satan, we are not unjust in suspecting some sinister departure from the doctrine which is according to godliness : we may conclude that some inclination is gratified, instead of duty followed ; that some “law of the members” is exalted above the law of God ; and that the truth, if held at all, is “held in unrighteousness.” Hence, our Saviour said to the scribes and Pharisees, notwithstanding the estimation in which they were held by the people on account of their seeming holiness—“I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you.”—“Ye hypocrites ! first make clean the inside of the platter.”—“Ye are of your father the devil, and the works of your father ye do.”

It is clear, however, from many incidental allusions in the gospels, that they made long prayers to be seen of men, and loved the greetings in the market-place—especially to be called “Rabbi ;” that they quoted and

perverted the law to corroborate their own private opinions, and used the name of Moses at once to cover and effect their selfish purposes. No one doubts the infidelity of Judas, because it is known that he deliberately betrayed Christ for lucre; nor can we doubt the infidelity of any one who professes Christianity, or connects himself with the church, in order to secure some worldly advantages. Instances of the kind are not wanting in our day; and if so, might not Moses have been repeatedly acknowledged among the Jews from similar motives? The presumption becomes certainty when we consider that theirs was a national religion, precluding any one's political advancement who did not acknowledge Moses, and securing to any one greater influence from whatever appearance of sanctity he was able to present.

If, then, there can be no belief in a religious teacher unless his authority be respected, his laws observed, and his interests consulted, it is certain that they who rejected Christ did not believe Moses. But if they had believed Moses, they would have believed in Christ. In order to belief, much depends on the previous state of the mind—quite as much, perhaps, as on the degree of evidence presented. I allude not now to the dominant sway of prejudice or of passion, but to the habit which may have been formed of reflecting seriously, and weighing matters candidly, together with the disposition to confirm or to correct one's views—to be delivered from error, or to ascertain the truth. He who takes an interest in a case at law, will be more likely to perceive the soundness or to detect the fallacy of the arguments

advanced. He who is conscious of the insufficiency of his attainments, will be more likely to enlarge his intellectual bounds than he who complacently thinks that there is no light beyond the limits of his own Gotham. Might it not, then, have been the case with these Jews, that they were not in a state of mind for investigating the claims of the Messiah—some of them not having been accustomed to thought; others being indifferent; and others, again, wrapped up in the notions of their own sect?

Hence the difference in men as to their appreciation of the Christian evidences. He who ever sits down to ponder the mystery of his being—who earnestly desires to know whence he is, and whither he is going—or who realizes the inconclusiveness of reason's deductions, and the insufficiency of all earthly things to promote his happiness—is the most likely, and always the first, to be convinced by the evidences of Revelation: his felt wants anticipate the necessity of elaborate documentary proof. The same preparation of mind for the reception of the truth, may be illustrated by a reference to some at the period of the Reformation. Dissatisfied with the condition of the church, most seriously disposed, and longing for a more excellent way, such minds were among the foremost to hail the teachings of the reformers; and, the more they studied the Scriptures, the stronger became their conviction that the reformers were sent of God.

In like manner, had the rejecters of Christ seriously believed in Moses, they would have understood the nature of his economy; looked through the sacrifices to

Him whom they prefigured, and perceived the application of its prophecies to him whom they saw before them. At least, by studying his writings and imbibing their spirit, they would have been prepared to respond to the glorious annunciation : “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given : and the government shall be upon his shoulder : and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”

It is not to be supposed that Abel, who by faith offered up a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain ; or that David, who so often tuned his harp in praise of the Messiah ; or that Isaiah, who prophetically described his person and all the circumstances of his life and death with the accuracy of an eye-witness—would have rejected Christ, had they lived to see him in the flesh. No ; and, as holy men of old “inquired and searched diligently,” so were there many at the period of the advent most earnestly looking for Him “of whom the prophets wrote”—even for “him who should redeem Israel.”

With what thrilling emotions did they hear the voice of one crying in the wilderness—“Prepare ye the way of the Lord ; make his paths straight !” And when Jesus came, how did they rejoice with exceeding great joy ; and with what cordiality did they embrace him—beholding then the desire of their eyes ! As the star guided the wise men to Bethlehem, so did their “hope in the promise which God had made unto their fathers,” guide them to Him who had come to fulfil the law and the prophets : and thus would it have been with

those who rejected Christ, had they only believed Moses.

If they had believed Moses, and, by consequence, “done justly, loved mercy, and walked humbly with God,” so far from rejecting, they would have been pre-disposed to admit the claims of one whose life was a living exemplification of the principles of the law, and whose ethical teachings so beautifully developed its meaning and illustrated its spirit. Not to them would his denunciation of injustice, hypocrisy, and self-righteousness have applied—suffusing their cheek with shame, or kindling their eye with rage; while every sentiment that fell from his lips would have met a response in their own love of goodness and virtue—eliciting the involuntary exclamation, “Never man spake like this man!” To the mind of a virtuous and devout Jew, the sermon on the Mount must have been invested with a resistless charm; and he who uttered it—all purity, all meekness, and all love!—must have appeared to be no less than a prophet sent of God. It is not to be conceived how a lover of truth and righteousness could be opposed to such a character as Jesus Christ. To suppose it possible, were to admit that a man of inflexible justice could condemn Aristides; that a merciful man could revile Howard; or that a patriot could loathe the character of Washington.

In this way, we account for the belief of many who saw Christ in the flesh. Accustomed to refer the Mosaic law to a Divine origin, and to regulate their actions by its rules, they felt that he whose life as well as teachings magnified the law, could not be an impostor; and

if not an impostor, then indeed he was the “light of the world,” and “the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world!”

It was owing to the fact that Cornelius was a devout man, “one who feared God with all his house,” that he was disposed to believe in Christ. The gospel unfolded to him clearer views of truth and duty; furnished him with stronger motives; presented to him a perfect example; and secured to him a perfect righteousness. On the other hand, men whose deeds are evil, love darkness rather than light; and hence, all such are now disposed to skepticism, and the most forward to avail themselves of any objections to the word of God. There is, indeed, an intimate sympathy between the affections and the judgment—the love of goodness opening the mind to truth; the love of vice blinding the mind to all that is true, and embittering the heart against all that is fair. Hence our Saviour, at one time, said to those who rejected him, “Ye will not come unto me that ye may have life;” and again, “If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.”

But the rejecters of Christ could not have believed in Moses without relying on the evidence which was furnished of his inspiration, his prophecies, and his miracles; and there was one who presented in his discourses evidence of the same kind, if not higher, that he was inspired with Divine wisdom; in his predictions, that he was endowed with prescience; and in his works, that the mighty hand of God was with him: nay, who with an authority superior to that of any preceding prophet

sent of God, spoke in his own name, and by his single word caused inanimate nature to attest the truth of his doctrine. It was on this ground that our Saviour said to them : “ If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not ; but if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works—the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me.”

Had they believed in Moses, from the conviction of those Divine evidences with which his mission had been accompanied—and on no other ground could they have rationally admitted his claims—surely they could not have consistently rejected the claims of Christ to the Messiahship, when they heard him speak as never man had spoken, and saw him do what no man had ever done before ; especially when they could not have been ignorant that the Mosaic writings themselves furnished ground for the confident expectation which then pervaded unnumbered minds, of the Messiah’s advent. The more closely they scrutinized his claims, the stronger would have been their conviction—“ This is He that should come.” The language of their hearts would have been even as that which burst from the lips of many a sincere Jew : “ We know that thou art a teacher come from God ; for no man can do these miracles which thou doest, except God be with him.”—“ We believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

In short, without an humble, docile heart, they could not have believed in Moses ; and, with such a heart, they would have believed in Christ. But they rejected him ; and this proves—inasmuch as their rejection of

Christ was the consequence of their not really believing Moses—that, though *they were in Israel*, they were *not of Israel*. And this conclusion involves a truth which it behooves us to ponder, and that most seriously—a truth which should impel every one to look into his own heart with jealous scrutiny. A man may deceive himself as to his religion—profess what he does not believe! Notwithstanding all their apparent zeal, though it might have maddened them to have their sincerity questioned, these very Jews did not believe Moses!

But is not human nature the same as ever? and the heart still deceitful above all things? Are there not the same temptations to hypocrisy and unbelief, and the same refuges of lies? What follows, then, but that some in our day may not believe in Christ, though they profess his name—may actually deceive themselves with a false hope? How little deference is there to the doctrine which is according to godliness; how little conformity to the precepts of the gospel; how much formality and worldliness even in the church!

Suppose Moses had re-appeared to the scribes and Pharisees, is it not probable to the last degree that they would have rejected his teachings, even as some of the ancient Israelites rose up against him in the wilderness? Does it, then, admit of a reasonable doubt, that, if Jesus Christ were to appear in our day, and to lift up his voice as he once spoke to the multitude in Judea, that some, even among those who call themselves Christians, would gnash on him with their teeth—exclaiming, even as some of the Jews of old, “Away with him, away with

him : we will not have this man to reign over us !” —
“ The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are we !”

Is this an unfounded presumption ? How happens it, then, that the gospel has in many instances ceased to be the rule of faith ; that the doctrines of the cross are so often an offence ; that the sayings of Jesus are to many hard sayings ; that the cause of Christ awakens no interest in some minds ; and that, among others, any efforts to advance his cause, to lead men to Christ that they may be justified by a faith which works by love, and purifies the heart, and overcomes the world, meets with opposition and hate ?

“ He that is not with me is against me,” said Christ. “ He that gathereth not with me, scattereth abroad.” — “ If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself.” — “ Ye shall know them by their fruits.” Hence — and it follows with logical certainty — he who is governed by the maxims of the world, by the traditions of the fathers, or by the commandments of men, has no submissive faith in the word of God ; he who does not observe the sayings of Christ to do them, has no love for him ; he who is devoted to “ the world with its affections and lusts ” — to fashion and to forms — is not seeking “ the things which belong to Jesus Christ.” Can there be *faith*, if his word be nothing to us whenever it clashes with either our reason or our traditions, our prejudices or our passions ? if his precepts are observed only when they coincide with our worldly interests ? if his religion is felt to be a burden, except so far as it may afford an opportunity for either exalting or aggrandizing ourselves ?

“Be not deceived ; God is not mocked ; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” The day is not far distant when “the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is :” and if so be that any who profess Christ have not been one with him in their views, and feelings, and actions — “I never knew you,” will be the sentence of the Judge ; ‘ye had your reward in the gratification of your own passions.’

Hence, there can be no neutrality. As, on the last day, we shall be placed either on the right hand or on the left of the Judge, so now we are either the sincere friends or the covert enemies of Jesus Christ—either justified by faith, or yet in our sins, and in danger of “the damnation of hell.”

How appalling the thought that any Christian professor may be infidel at heart—may at last hear those irrevocable words of exclusion and reprobation !

What a serious matter is it, then, to profess Christ, with such a heart as mine—so prone to unbelief ! in such a world as this, where error is so multiform and insidious, and self so seldom appealed to in vain !

Ah me, it is a difficult thing to be a Christian ! What searching of heart is necessary—what circumspection, what humility, what self-denial ! Still, let me not shrink from the work of God—the work of faith. Let the world account me credulous and austere, or withhold from me all that it has to give : but, O my God, suffer me not to be false to Christ !

THE SIN OF THE PHARISEES.

THERE have been various theories respecting the ‘unpardonable sin.’ Some have taxed their ingenuity, others their imagination; and others, again—from the conflicting views of theologians—have supposed that no satisfactory explanation could be given. But in this, as in relation to many scriptural points, the necessity for ingenious speculation might have been precluded, or the possibility of an erroneous construction avoided, had there been only a simple effort to ascertain the circumstances which gave rise to our Saviour’s solemn asseveration. Overlook the context, and there can be no end to conjecture as to the meaning of any scriptural passage; and no possibility of agreement in view, so long as minds reason from their own independent data, or are warped in judgment by their respective prepossessions.

It appears that Christ had recently performed several miracles; and, among other astonishing and gracious works, had restored to sight and to speech one who, having been possessed with a devil, was both blind and dumb.* As a necessary consequence, “all the people were amazed.” Such a miracle could have been performed by no ordinary personage: it naturally suggested to them the presence and power of one sent of God; it

* Matthew xi. 22–33.

brought to their recollection that prophecy which had been uttered in the hearing of their fathers : “ Then, the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped ;” thus inducing the involuntary exclamation—‘ Is not this the son of David ? is not this the promised descendant of David—the Messiah ?’

Such an inference was obtruded on their minds by the miracle itself ; while the miracle, when interpreted in the light of the Old-Testament prophecies, served to corroborate their inference. The wonder is, not that so many people, in consequence of the miracle, should have been inclined to embrace Christ as the Messiah, but that any could have refrained from responding to their pertinent interrogatory—“ Is not this the son of David ?” Disbelief, under such circumstances, merited a rebuke not less sarcastic than that which the blind man whose eyes Jesus had opened, administered to the Pharisees : “ Why herein is a marvellous thing, that ye know not whence he is ; and yet he hath opened mine eyes !”

Was it not clear, from their own Scriptures, that a Redeemer was promised ? Had not the whole Jewish nation been anxiously expecting their long-predicted Messiah ? Was not his coming to be attended with signal blessings to their nation and to the world ? Yes ; but what was popular sentiment to those who affected to look down on the common people ? what the general good of the people to men whose only aim was to retain their own authority ? and of what avail all the evidence with which the Messiahship of Christ was accompanied, but to convince the Pharisees that the authority of their

teachings was endangered ; that, just in proportion as he rose in popular estimation, they would sink ?

How often do selfish interests obscure one's perceptions to the truth of God, or close his heart against the claims of duty ! What do some care for the welfare of society, for the cause of truth and righteousness, so long as they can retain the honors or the fees of office ? How will they contend for their own worldly interests, under the plea of opposing pernicious errors, or of exposing sinister motives !—just as the Romanists persecuted Luther, to secure the sale of indulgences ; representing him to be in league with the devil, or Satan himself in the garb of an angel of light, that they might counteract the force of his scriptural arguments. It is, in fact, a common expedient of wicked men to asperse the motives for an act, if they cannot deny its apparent goodness ; to disarm the force of whatever truth may interfere with their selfish interests, by vilifying the character of its advocate. Herein may be detected the secret of the Pharisees' opposition to the teachings and miracles of our blessed Lord : they saw that their own authority with the people was in danger. Too haughty to bow themselves to the claims of Christ, they were at the same time too selfish to relinquish their hold on the popular mind ; and yet, though they themselves would not yield, in what way could they restrain the people ?

It will avail nothing to deny the miracle : a thousand voices at once testify to the fact. Equally futile will it be to deny that such a miracle must have been wrought by supernatural power : the people can never be induced to believe that it bespeaks no higher agency than

any skilful man might exert ; and they may gravely challenge us to do the same. We must grant, therefore, that a miracle has been wrought—and, moreover, that it could not have been performed by man's unaided power : but, at the same time, we must persuade them that Christ himself is not only unworthy of their confidence, but beneath their respect ; that *we* look down on him with sentiments of scorn and abhorrence ; that no one who either regards his own religious interests, or respects his character in society, should follow a man who is in league with the very god of filth and abomination ! ‘Yes ; we grant you that a miracle has been wrought, and that, too, by supernatural power ; but is there no power besides Divine power ? is there not a satanic influence which is often mistaken for the very hand of God ? Does not the devil himself sometimes assume the appearance of an angel of light ? “Why, this fellow doth not cast out devils but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils !” ’

Wonderful explanation ! as though the devil would intentionally defeat his own purposes ! as though he would prompt and aid Christ to undo what he himself had done ! This were to array Satan against Satan—for Satan to cast out Satan ! So true is it that malignity often outwits itself.

Hence, said Jesus : “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation ; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.”—‘Satan's kingdom cannot stand, if, according to your principles of reasoning, I am in league with him, and yet against him !’

But, not content with having, as it were, exposed the absurdity of their explanation of the miracle, he arraigned their own followers against their argument; for, as they pretended to cast out devils, it followed that they themselves must also be leagued with the devil; and then, as though he had designed to cover them with confusion worse confounded, he shows them that, according to their own principles of reasoning, he must have overcome and subdued Satan himself—rendering him utterly powerless to retain his hold on any person, or to accomplish his plans: “How can one enter into a strong man’s house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man?”

Perhaps there never was, in so few words, so complete a refutation of a most insidious and malignant attack. He had not only caused their argument to recoil with emphasis against themselves—but, as they had admitted supernatural agency in the case, it followed that, if the work was not done by the aid of Satan, it must have been by the power of God—these two forces, the one of God, and the other of Satan, being in essential and necessary antagonism: and if nothing short of Divine power could rescue men from the dominion of Satan, it conclusively followed that God had set up his kingdom in the midst of them.

But, in addition to this, our Saviour lays down and urges a great principle—a principle to which on several occasions he had adverted, and which, in this connection, is introduced with striking force. Guided by this principle, there is little danger of mistaking either the import of the miracle which he had wrought, or the

relations which he himself sustained. ‘There are but two great antagonistic powers in the universe: between them there can be no compromise, no neutrality; and, by consequence, if I am not in league with Satan, I must be opposed to him; and if you are not in league with me, you must be in league with him. If I do not aid Satan, I must oppose him; and, in like manner, if you oppose me, you aid him: *he that is not for me, is against me*; and on this principle, in siding against me, you side with Satan, and against God!’

Having thus turned their argument against themselves, he proceeds to expose their criminality—to lay bare the nature of the *sin* of which they had been guilty in having charged him with being in league with Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. In so doing, they had offered a direct insult to the Spirit of God—that power by which the miracle had been wrought; thus virtually ascribing an exhibition of Divine power and mercy to the agency of the Evil One. They had, consequently, sinned against the Holy Ghost; and for this very reason, because, according to St. Mark, they had said that “Jesus was possessed of an unclean spirit.” Other sins were venial in comparison with this; other sins God might pardon on the repentance and faith of the transgressor; but this, involving so deep and damning an insult to the Most High—being at once so presumptuous and awful—there can be no forgiveness for it, either in this world or in the world to come: that is—for it is a Hebrew form of expression—God would never forgive it—*hath never forgiveness*, as St. Mark explains it, and thus determines the meaning of the

phrase—but *is in danger of eternal damnation*: it insured everlasting destruction.

It was no trifling offence to speak against him as the Son of man: still, though they should reflect on his birthplace and parentage, on his poverty and lowliness; and invidiously call him a Nazarene, or contemptuously ask whether “any good thing could come out of Nazareth”—yet, for such affronts, there was forgiveness on repentance: but if they accused him of being in league with Satan, they were guilty of a blasphemous attack on his Divine nature and power. By so doing, they at once impugned his Divinity, and most foully aspersed the power of his Father: they had said of him whom the Father had sanctified, that he was corrupt; and therefore they were guilty of blasphemy, not merely against the Spirit with which the man Christ Jesus was actuated, but against the Spirit of God himself!

That this is the simple meaning of the passage, and that our Saviour did not refer to some special sin against the third person of the Trinity, is conclusively evident from the following verse: “Either make the tree good and his fruit good, or else make the tree corrupt and his fruit corrupt; for the tree is known by his fruit.” This is an infallible criterion—an absolute, universal, unchanging standard of human judgment. ‘Now, *I* must be corrupt, if my doctrines and works are those of the devil; but if they are not, then you have been guilty of blasphemy in ascribing them to satanic influence; and not only so, but you convict yourselves of that which you charge on me: *your* works are the works of the

devil, and your doctrines such as he teaches. "O generation of vipers!"

The reference is rather to the Divine nature of Christ, than to the third person of the Godhead—to the Divine power by which he wrought the miracle; and, in blaspheming that power, consisted the great sin of the Pharisees; and that sin was unpardonable. It was the highest possible affront that could be offered to God: he who committed it, accused God's only-begotten and well-beloved Son of having conspired with Satan, and, by necessary consequence, of being *himself a devil*!

But though our Saviour's declaration affords no countenance to the notion that sin against the Holy Ghost is of a more aggravated nature than an offence committed against God the Father or God the Son, it is nevertheless fraught with the most solemn meaning, while it admits of a wider application than is generally supposed. Taken in its scriptural connection, it furnishes us with a *principle* which will serve to guide us in determining the different degrees of guilt which men may incur, or the greater danger to which they may be exposed.

Thus, he who denies that the Scriptures were *written by inspiration of God*, is in danger on the *same principle* by which our Saviour condemned the Pharisees. They ascribed his miracles to the agency of the Evil One; and what is it to deny the inspiration of the Scriptures, but virtually to assert that they were instigated by the devil?—for, if they were not written by the finger of Divine inspiration, it follows that they were written by wicked and designing men.

It is in vain to say they might have been good though

mistaken men. Whatever their moral character, if they did not write under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, they must have known that they were fabricating a story to impose on the world; and they must have been the most daring and adroit impostors that ever lived—the very children of the devil, him who is the father of lies, and a murderer from the beginning.

This is the alternative to which we are unavoidably reduced in relation to the Scriptures: either they are true, or they are false. If true, then they are of God; if false, of the devil. There is no middle ground between truth and falsehood—between the principle of all good and the principle of all evil; and he who regards the Scriptures as the work of men, is in no wise less culpable than the Pharisees, who thought to trace Christ's miraculous power to his co-operation with Satan.

Little did the Pharisees think of the real import and bearing of their explanation; and seldom may the infidel pause to reflect on the import of his own objections. Be this as it may, he has virtually ascribed the work of the Scriptures to the agency of the Evil One; and if this be not, to all intents and purposes, blasphemy against the Holy Ghost—that Spirit which indited the Scriptures—then there is no relevancy in our Saviour's reasoning against the position of the Pharisees.

It avails nothing to say he may not believe that the Scriptures have been written by inspiration of God: neither did the Pharisees believe that our Saviour's miracle was a Divine miracle. But, as they withstood the clearest evidence, and perverted an unquestionable fact, through the selfishness and malignity of their hearts,

what but some equally selfish or malignant purpose can lead a man to withstand the evidences of inspired truth? Did the former only betray their desperate depravity, then the latter, in denying the inspiration of Scripture, evinces no less presumption and impiety. Nay, no man who is not himself in league with the powers of darkness, could deliberately give this word the lie. He must be already given up to judicial blindness of mind and hardness of heart, who can lay his hand on the Bible and say, ‘I believe this book to be false as hell;’ much more, if, having uttered this in his retirement, he hears no accusing voice from within, whispering as from the depths of an oracle—‘Fool! madman! the curse of God is on thee!’

Men may have their doubts, and be inclined to listen to objections; or they may utter remarks in public which in private their own consciences force them to retract. For the sake of showing their superiority to the common mind, or of being undisturbed in their worldly course, they may ward off the arrows of truth, and affect to be what they are not; but, however hazardous the course which such are pursuing, they are not as yet lost to all moral sensibility: their assertions belie their convictions; their assumed indifference, or even their jeers and witticisms, but ill conceal the wrestling uneasiness of their thoughts. Notwithstanding their habit of talking, or their forwardness to start difficulties, such are not without their moments of seriousness. Conscience at times rebukes them; and conscience can be silenced only by worldly diversion, or by the secret purpose of final repentance: and thus it happens that men of

this class are not unfrequently brought to the penitent acknowledgment and belief of the truth. Here and there, too, is a man whose mind is embarrassed by some irrelevant difficulty; who would believe, but cannot; who looks on Christianity as a most beautiful theory, and goes away sorrowing.

But in relation to the other class of skeptics—they who, having long trifled with serious things, have at last seared their consciences, and therefore not hesitated to revile and ridicule as well as denounce the Scriptures—it admits of doubt whether any one of this class has ever been brought to true repentance. Were such men as Paine and Voltaire? Alas! their souls were steeped in the guilt of blasphemy—blasphemy against the Holy Ghost! For them, there was no peace—no hope: they awoke at last to their enormous guilt, only to die embosomed in the horrors of the second death!

Akin to this, and almost as hazardous, is the sin of taking from, or adding to, the inspired Scriptures. This is done, on the one hand, by the rationalist, and, on the other, by the traditionist; and, in either case, what less does it involve than an affront to the Spirit of God? Is it not to assert that God's Spirit has indited either more or less than is necessary to our salvation? Does it not virtually impeach either the truthfulness or the sufficiency of the inspired Scriptures? Is it not, to a certain extent, either falsifying the mind of the Spirit, or wholly disparaging his work? And thus to pervert the Scriptures—what is this but the very conduct of the Pharisees, who perverted a Divine miracle?—like them, admitting only so much of the miracle of inspiration as

will suit our theories or our selfish interests ; or so overlaying the Scriptures as to lessen the inspired writers in the estimation of the people, and to exalt ourselves — leading the people to adhere to us rather than to follow Christ ! It is even to convict ourselves of being in league with self and the world, against the admission or against the spread of evangelical truth ! To us, this seems too obvious to need either proof or illustration. Yet, if one should retain a book which the author had loaned to him, and after a while return it to him, with here and there a passage cut out, and some of its pages torn out — having left only such parts as he did not dislike — would it not be said that he had taken an unpardonable liberty ? or if, instead of the same book, he should send his own comments in the place of it, assuring the author that without his comments it could not be understood, or might be perverted — what greater insult could he offer ? But such is the audacious liberty which the rationalist takes with God's word ; such, too, though in an incomparably greater degree, the affront which the traditionist puts on God's Revelation ! Instead of God's word, he hands us the decrees of men ; instead of bowing to the truth of God, he turns the truth into a lie by his traditions. In all such cases, the sin of mocking and insulting the Spirit of God is just as apparent as if a juggler or a mesmerizer should attempt, by imitating the Christian miracles, to disparage the power of Jesus Christ.

Hence it appears that he who has once deliberately perverted the plain meaning of Scripture, goes on, as by a fatal necessity, in the downward road of error. Having

perverted one passage, he has less difficulty in perverting another ; having discarded one doctrine, he cannot rest until he has explained away another : until, from being a Pelagian, he becomes a Socinian ; from being a Socinian, he becomes also a Universalist ; and thence verges with rapid strides to infidelity : or, from being a fanatic, he becomes a formalist ; and thence a malignant bigot, or a gloomy, scornful skeptic !

Thus it is, also, that he who begins to interpret Scripture by tradition, seldom ends until he has lost sight of Scripture in his traditions, and all regard for truth and righteousness in his greater deference to the tithe of mint, anise, and cumin.

There is, indeed, a closer affinity between the rationalist and the traditionist than might be supposed : though perhaps opposed to each other on certain points, yet at last they meet, as on a common platform, in their efforts to pervert and obscure the mind of the Spirit.

Be it considered that some of the most malignant and ruthless infidels have sprung from the bosom of Rome, as well as from the schools of rationalism ; and if there be so close a connection between the perversion and the rejection of the Scriptures, do not they who either deface or obscure the mind of the Spirit contract peculiar guilt ?

Can we do no more than draw an inference from the case of the Pharisees ? Be it so : but let no one say that the inference is unsupported by scriptural analogy, until he has pondered the testimony of St. John : “ For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are

written in this book : and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book."

In like manner we might show what a risk they incur who presume to resolve all instances of conversion into the power of fanatical delusion. No one can look into the history of Christ without perceiving that almost all his difficulties arose from the Pharisees ; but men are now just as tenacious of power and pomp as they were then—just as averse from any thing that tends to mortify their pride, or obstruct the gratification of their selfish aspirations. The carnal mind—no matter what the phases of belief or of godliness it may have assumed—is still, as we have before noted, enmity against God. The fact of its making mention of God, and professing a regard for his honor, may be in perfect consistency with the fact that it is inimical to the truth of God ; and one of the ways in which it betrays the state of its affections, is the very way which the Pharisees adopted to disparage our Saviour's miracles.

They cannot deny that in a given instance there is all the scriptural evidence of a true conversion from sin unto holiness. The individual has showed unquestionable signs of repentance and faith ; and he is abounding in all those fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. But will they admit that this change has been wrought by the Spirit of God ? This were to admit that Christianity is true ; or, if its truth be granted, this were to

acknowledge that God may employ other instruments of casting out devils besides themselves: nay, it were to undermine the foundation on which they have built their own authority! What then?—it is only an instance of fanaticism! it is the delusion of the devil!—Thus the Pharisees' explanation of our Saviour's miracle is in reality the construction which is sometimes put on the striking phenomena of a revival of religion, or on individual instances of signal conversion.

For myself, I dare not disparage the evidences of true piety, lest my own works be arraigned as witnesses against me; nor forbid others to cast out devils, lest I convict myself of a greater regard for my own authority and influence among men than for the welfare of perishing souls. I dare not resolve the most benign and glorious effects which religion has ever produced, into fanaticism, lest, with the infidel, I confound God's work with the work of the Evil One; or, with the Pharisee, incur the guilt of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost!

But, however presumptuous it would be in us to say of any one, that he has committed a sin which God will never pardon; and however difficult, or rather impossible, it is to prove that some particular word or act constitutes the unpardonable sin—though no one has any scriptural reason to conclude that he has committed this sin, so long as he feels his need of a Saviour, and has a heart to believe on Christ, acknowledging his dependence on God's holy Spirit,—yet certain it is, from the teachings of Scripture, that “there is a sin unto death”—a sin which *hath never forgiveness!*

If there is not, why should Christ's ambassadors so

often set forth the evidences of gospel truth, and aim to convince men of their guilt and danger ; so often call on them to repent and believe, and solemnly warn them against the imminent hazard of delay ; so often tell them, weeping, that they are “ the enemies of the cross of Christ,” and beseech them, “ in Christ’s stead, to be reconciled to God ?” All who are still out of Christ must be exposing themselves to tremendous risk—or the gospel is without meaning, and all preaching worse than a solemn farce. The sin, then, to which we allude, is that of *final unbelief* : into this all other sins may be resolved—all modes of skepticism and formalism—all covert as well as open opposition to the truth—all enmity or indifference to the Redeemer’s kingdom—all preference of self and the world to the love of souls and the glory of God—all neglect of opportunities—all resistance of conviction—all trifling with the word and the Spirit of God : this necessarily involves the sin of resisting, and of affronting, and of grieving away the ever-blessed Spirit of God, whose province it is to convince of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come, and without whose influences, working faith, and love, and purity in the heart, no one can enter the kingdom of God.

Hence it is that he who has ceased to feel on the subject of religion ; whom no entreaties, no warnings, can move ; who intentionally dismisses serious thoughts whenever they are brought to his mind—may have already committed this sin. The Spirit of God may have withdrawn from him ! and if so, he can never be brought to repentance. His peace is a false peace.

He has built his house on the sand. He will die as he had lived. In consequence of his resistance to the truth, or his endeavors to explain it away in accordance with his heart's lusts—having stifled his own convictions, or having closed his eyes against the miracles of conversion wrought by an omnipotent Spirit—God may have given him up to strong delusions, to believe a lie to his own destruction. Hence the danger, not only of falsifying and of perverting or obscuring the mind of the Spirit as revealed through the sacred oracles, but of *trifling* with sacred things and serious convictions; and, by consequence, of grieving the Spirit!

Unbelief! this is the sin of sins—the deadly, damning sin; for Christ himself has said: “He that believeth shall be saved; he that believeth not shall be damned.” Hence the unutterably solemn force of the apostolic injunction—“*Grieve not the Spirit!*” He who has often by turns shuddered and wept as the solemn thoughts of death, judgment, and eternity came over his mind, *may* banish all serious reflection, and stifle his convictions; but why should God’s Spirit ever return, when once deliberately resisted?

THE WAYS OF THE WORLD.

It is remarkable that, previous to John's execution, Herod had not heard of Christ's miraculous works. The supposition that he had been for some time absent from his domain, might be admitted in explanation of the fact, were it not that the intelligence of Christ's miracles was as strange to his courtiers as to himself. Nor is it any more reasonable to suppose that, as Christ had then endowed his disciples with miraculous power, and sent them forth to act in his name, Herod was induced for the first time to attend to the report. His exclamation implies that he had never heard of our Saviour's doings before, or even known that such a personage existed ; while the fact itself serves to prove, not that the commencement of Christ's ministry occasioned but little excitement through Judea, but simply that the worldly great men of those times stood aloof from the people, and that they did not voluntarily avail themselves of any opportunity for receiving religious intelligence.*

Even now, men of this rank, especially if they are occupied with the affairs of civil government, are apt to be regardless of all religious movements—perhaps indifferent to the spiritual operations of the church with which they are nominally connected. Some man of

* Matthew xiv. 1-12.

God may appear in their immediate vicinage, preaching in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, to listening thousands ; while they are as uninterested, it may be as ignorant of the event, as though they dwelt in a different planet. They *do* move in a different world : it is the world of fashion, of convivial pleasure, of politics, or of speculation—that world to which Herod and his court belonged.

At last the intelligence of some great religious movement is forced on their hearing ; and if it be not possible to deny the facts, they are immediately resolved into the force of enthusiasm or of fanaticism—some shrewd design for defrauding the multitude of their gains, or enlisting popular applause ! So, when Herod heard of the fame of Jesus, and was constrained to form a judgment of his mighty works, he could account for them in no other way than that the recently decapitated Baptist had risen from the dead !

But this is not the only particular in which Herod will serve to illustrate the ways of the world. Because Salome had danced before him, thus ministering for a brief hour to the gratification of his eye, he promised her the half of his kingdom ! But John, who had so long and faithfully aimed to promote his best interests, is thrust into prison ; nay, the head of that holy man is not too great a recompense for the pleasure of seeing Salome dance !

Thus Socrates, who “passed his whole time in inciting the young and the old to care for neither body nor estate in preference to, or in comparison with, the excellence of the soul,” was rewarded by imprisonment

and death ! We need not add, thus was a greater than Socrates repaid for a life of unparalleled self-denial in the cause of ruined humanity.

So now, he who aims to correct the views and reform the habits of worldly men, incurs their displeasure ; while he who contributes to the gratification of their passions, may enjoy their favor. To be regarded as their friend, it is simply necessary to encourage, or rather not to molest them in their ruinous courses. Of what account to such is any opportunity for receiving religious instruction, compared with an evening of convivial pleasure ? What are the teachings of the greatest and best of men, compared with the fascinations of the stage, the antics of a dancer, or the jokes of a clown ? —Hence it is that places of worldly amusement are thronged, while the sanctuaries of religion attract but few ; that the praise of an actor may be on every lip, while a faithful preacher of the gospel is too often spoken of only to be maligned ; that it is so much easier to raise money for a theatre than a church ; to further some political project than to advance the cause of Christianity.

Wherever his own selfish gratification is concerned, there man may be all liberality ; but in matters which respect God's glory and the great ends of life, he betrays his niggardliness, if not his malignity. Whenever the triumph of party demands the sacrifice of all self-respect, he can extol the most unsuitable candidate for office ; and, in like manner, he may praise and sustain the prophet who prophesies falsely, or utters "smooth things," and "plays skilfully upon an instrument ;" but

all his feelings will gather into acrimony against the prophet who, in fidelity to his soul, tells him of his sins, and kindly essays to disrupt the ties that bind him to a soul-destroying world.

We can hardly recall, without a tear, the sad fate that genius has often encountered ; but what are the so-called “calamities of authors” who toiled to enlarge the views and refine the sentiments of society, compared with the occasional trials of gospel ministers ? It is their lot, at times, not merely to struggle with want, but with obloquy — to be reviled even when they come forth to bless !

A wicked man can have no cordiality toward a faithful minister. He may profess regard : like Herod, he may do many things gladly — attend the preached word, and assume the posture of devotion ; but let the minister of the sanctuary designate his besetting sin or unhalloved pursuit, and, revealing his true character, convict him before the bar of Heaven, as well as of his own conscience, of deliberately violating the principles of truth and duty — sacrificing the moral interests of others for the sake of his own selfish ends — and he goes away, not to repent in secret places, but to give vent to angry and embittered feelings. Seldom is it that any one will bear to be told *his sin*, be it only some foible of character ; much less if that sin be of a heinous nature, and the guilty man has prided himself on his standing.

Is it contended that no offence can be taken where none is intended, or where zeal has not degenerated into acrimonious rashness ? What judgment, then, must we pronounce, not only on such men of God as Hanani and Zechariah, to whom we have referred, but on John

Baptist, and the Apostle Paul, and even Christ himself?

In doubtful matters, one cannot be too slow to speak ; but when a practice is known to be wrong, such as the Bible may have singled out for emphatic reprehension, there is an authoritative call for prompt reproof and earnest expostulation. The greater one's guilt and the more imminent his danger, the more imperative is the duty of faithfulness on the part of the minister of the sanctuary ; but the greater consequently is his liability to the enmity, if not the revenge of a wicked man. Such is the opposition of the natural heart to God's authority—so bent is it, at times, on its unhallowed gains or vicious pleasures. It should then be understood, and duly pondered, that the manner in which one receives scriptural reproof, and treats his reprover, is no fallacious criterion of Christian character.

Though Herod might of his own accord have imprisoned the Baptist, yet is it evident that he would not have proceeded to the extremity of guilt, had it not been for the machinations of Herodias. He yielded to importunity, contrary to the convictions of his own mind, and to the remonstrances of his own conscience. There is, indeed, no probability of our being ever tempted to effect the imprisonment and death of a good man ; but where is the family in which there is not essential dissimilarity of view and feeling on the subject of religion ? Great as are the temptations to which the Christian is exposed in the relations of secular business, his most dangerous tempters may be under his own roof, around his own hearth. His example is a tacit reproof to their

worldliness ; or, through the ascendancy of worldly views, they are mortified at what seems to them revolting austerity or affected singularity, ignorance of the world or a foolish disregard for one's own interests : hence, he is tempted to modify his views, to compromise his principles, or to neglect some special duty. Thus it occasionally happens that a religious husband is drawn aside from his duty by the influence of an irreligious wife ; that a converted youth is diverted from the work of the gospel ministry by the views of paternal ambition ; that a gay and frivolous mother at last prevails over the religious scruples which her daughter may have imbibed at school, and ushers her into all the folly and guilt of fashionable life ; that even the minister of the gospel is at times betrayed, through the flatteries of his relatives, into a spirit of vainglory and levity of conduct, perhaps into worldliness.

Thus, too, are we enabled to account for some of those instances of injustice and passion which are so difficult to be reconciled with our knowledge of previous character : one defrauding his creditors, lest family pride should be humbled ; another, though a man of plain habits, suddenly affecting family splendor ; another, though not devoid of either mind or conscience, feeling himself insulted by the gospel message ; and another, a man of naturally kind and amiable feelings, incensed at some imaginary wrong, or pertinaciously cherishing the most malicious prejudice.

The moral dangers of the domestic relation arise from the desirableness of living in harmony with those with whom we are necessarily brought in contact ; from our

natural unwillingness to disoblige those to whom we are related ; and then, again, from the facilities which the family relation affords for the gradual development of a scheme, or for seizing on the best possible opportunity. There, every member is naturally free and unrestrained, suspicionless and open ; and, as no one thinks of being on his guard against those with whom he is connected by ties naturally so endearing—whose worldly interest is one and the same—hence the advantage which any unprincipled or artful member has for effecting a sinister purpose.

Herodias, though the king would not yield to her wishes, did not despair : she watched her opportunity, and found it when he had forgotten himself in an hour of riotous festivity. So has many a person been betrayed into a promise which it was alike sinful to make, and difficult to break—enticed to scenes which his Christian profession forbade him to witness—drawn away from the sanctuary, and led into a life of worldliness, until at last the tempted becomes the tempter !

Strong and lasting is the influence of the family relation ; and therefore the Christian cannot pause too long before cementing a union with an irreligious person. If Christ's foes were those of his own household, it needs not excite our surprise should the arch-adversary of souls seek his agents among those from whom we look for regard, and in whom we naturally confide.

There are times when innocent enjoyments dispose us to thoughtlessness, or when unexpected occurrences incline us to frivolity—when success is apt to inflate us with pride, or disappointment to render us gloomy

and despondent ; and these are ordinarily the *convenient times* for the Great Tempter : and, though it may seem a trivial matter if, in order to gratify the wishes of others, or to secure their favorable opinion, we yield to temptation but only once—yet, by so doing, we have impaired the strength of our principles, and perhaps fatally wounded the integrity of our souls.

Herod's subsequent crimes are all directly traceable to his unlawful marriage ; as the enormities of Domitian may be traced to a seemingly insignificant circumstance in his early life. No man becomes a villain at once ; and no one knows what will be the ultimate consequences of yielding to any temptation. At first he only conceals the truth ; then tells a deliberate falsehood ; and finally perjures himself ! At first he indulges only in irritated feelings, or petty malice ; at last, sheds a brother's blood, and blasphemes his Maker ! He thinks there is no harm, much less danger, in indulging the lusts of the eye : ere long he is apprehended for theft, or convicted of adultery ! He has taken only a little advantage of his neighbor : now he deliberately aims to overreach, and ends by forging another's name, or by sacrificing another's life for gain ! Is it unnecessary to multiply instances ? We are convinced that one sin leads on, by a necessary connection, to another and a greater : but who bears this in mind, or takes timely warning ? Does the idler ? No ; or he would at once betake himself to some employment, be it only for the sake of employment, lest, through the oppressive vacuity of idleness, he seek the excitement of the damning bowl ; or, through the embarrassment of his affairs, be allured

to the gambler's hell. — Does the lover of high life? No; or he would earnestly sue for an humble heart, foreseeing the abyss that awaits him, and perhaps his family, should he persist in those extravagances which lead, by necessary steps, to profligacy and ruin! — Does the Christian professor? Why, then, are so many undistinguished from the world, though they were once most circumspect? They *meant* to sin but once only; and that was a little sin! But now they can violate the Lord's day, and feel no compunction; now they can frequent haunts of vicious amusement, and presume to justify themselves; now they can habitually neglect even the private duties of religion! Nor did that youth, who had been religiously educated, consider this; or he would have paused before he suffered any worldly company or feelings of lassitude to keep him from the house of God: he may go on, attending with less and less regularity, until at last he not only deserts the sanctuary, but forswears his father's God!

It is indeed hazardous to yield to any temptation, but still more dangerous to persist in any known sin. In the former case, the world gradually obtains an insensible control over our hearts; in the latter, we abandon all regard for principle, and lose all sense of sin: and the only reason we have not omitted other duties, and committed other sins, is simply because we have not yet been suitably tempted. Herod's governing principle of action could have had no reference to any thing without or beyond himself. He would have imprisoned the Baptist long before, had he not feared the people. He was, indeed, shocked at Salome's scandalous re-

quest; but, having been so positive in his offer, and that, too, in the presence of his guests, he was really ashamed to refuse, rather than perplexed by any conscientious scruples respecting his oath: and now, to please the people, this same Herod that beheaded John, delivers up JESUS to be insulted and scourged!

But even this act of consummate injustice and wrong need not excite our surprise. In relation to Christ, he acted precisely as a man invested with authority might have been expected to act, whose understanding had been perverted and conscience seared by protracted indulgence in known sin. As a vessel without a helm is driven to and fro according to the shifting direction of the winds, so a man without moral principle must be impelled from one crime to another, according to the directing force of his depraved interests. There can be no moral impediment in the way of murder to one who, in defiance of the law of Heaven, lives in adultery; or of perjury, to one who habitually violates truth; or of swindling, to one who accustoms himself to over-reaching in little matters. Hence it is that he who knowingly offends in one point, is guilty of disobeying the authority of the whole law. Though the offence may be seemingly trivial, the authority of the Lawgiver is as truly discarded as though it had been a palpable crime. If God has said, "Thou shalt not kill," is it not the same Being who has said, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart?" If God has said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," is it not the same holy Being who has specified and prohibited the *adultery of the eye*? If God has said, "Thou shalt not take the name of the

Lord thy God in vain," has he not also, and with no less distinctness, declared that "for every *false and malicious* word men speak they shall give account?"

We recoil from flagrant acts of wickedness; but how obvious is it that he who refuses to surrender his will to God, even in little matters, betrays the same want of loyalty to Heaven! His seeming obedience in other respects is prompted, not by a sense of duty, but by expediency, or by a regard to his own selfish interests; his morality is determined, not by his conscience, but by his temperament: other things being equal, he may yet habitually violate some great commandment with as little compunction as he now hugs his secret sin.

It is not unusual for those who may be indulging some unchristian passion, or pursuing some iniquitous course of conduct, to felicitate themselves that they have not yielded to other temptations; and sometimes such regard themselves as fair candidates for heaven, because they are not chargeable with heinous breaches of morality, and do respect religion and its ordinances. But the Divine law is uncompromising, as well as "exceeding broad:" "Put her away"—"Deny thyself"—"Pluck it out"—"Cut it off."

Herod did many things gladly—paid more attention to his public duties, showed more kindness and compassion, more regard for equity, and, it may be, for the public worship of God; and doubtless hoped by his partial reformation to avert the Divine judgments with which John had threatened him. But these politic observances did not impose on the Baptist: "Put her away," was the reiterated charge of the stern herald of

Heaven's vengeance. 'In vain are all your observances and oblations, so long as you retain Herodias. Repent of that sin by putting her away, or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.'

It matters not, therefore, what one may do to propitiate Heaven, so long as he retains any unlawful gain, or clings to any sinful gratification. His moralities cannot make amends for his secret sin, nor his ceremonial for his neglect of private duties. In the eye of God's law, no one virtue can be offset against a known sin; nor can any sacrifice compensate for any sinful indulgence. Obedience it requires, and nothing short of cordial, unreserved, uniform, and complete obedience, can meet its spiritual demands. He must indeed be a stranger to the teachings of the Bible, who presumes to think that God's law can overlook defective obedience, much less any known omission of duty. Could its demands have been in any wise relaxed, the Son of God would not have been made the curse of the law for us; and yet, though he died to render the pardon of the sinner consistent with the claims of a holy and inviolable authority, "he is the end of the law for righteousness" only to him "that believeth." To believe in him, necessarily implies repentance for sin, and a desire, and aim, and constant endeavor, to be delivered from its power; and therefore, aside from all reference to that perfect obedience which the law requires, no one can scripturally regard himself as a believer in Christ, who does not in all things aim to do as Christ has commanded. In fact, the great object of his mission was, to unfold the spiritual import and extent of the law—to

illustrate its purity, and enforce its authority ; and nothing is more evident, from the whole tenor of his teachings, than the superiority of moral conduct required of those who profess to believe in him and hope in his salvation. If a man will not examine himself in the light of Christ's requirements, he may easily deceive himself as to his true character ; but if he will, he may as easily ascertain wherein he is still grossly culpable, or what may be his besetting sin. There is but one method by which any man can come to a knowledge of his moral self ; and should its adoption not lead to so important a result, it will be owing, not to a want of scriptural criteria of character, but solely to the absence of that humility and candor with which the work of self-examination should be prosecuted.

He who would promote his spiritual well-being by growing conformity of heart and life to the requisitions of duty, will not be backward to scrutinize his motives as well as his actions. He may say to himself : ' Though I may not be addicted to any vices, nor chargeable with either dishonesty, intemperance, or lewdness, yet am I not either covetous or penurious ? am I not ambitious, or proud and passionate, or envious and revengeful ? am I not vain of this possession, or that acquirement—fond of personal display, or of selfish and sensual gratifications ? Though I am moral, have I the evidence of having been regenerated by the Spirit of God ? Or, as I have named the name of Christ, am I careful to depart from all iniquity—even to avoid the appearance of evil ? Am I cherishing any one feeling, or doing any one thing, at variance with the integrity of my professed

belief in him whose example I am bound to follow? — “To him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.” — “If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man’s religion is vain.” Though he conform to Christ’s precepts in every other respect, that man’s religion is hypocrisy — his *unbridled tongue* betrays him! The man in the parable who received the *one talent* was neither a thief nor a murderer, nor had he wasted his lord’s goods: he pleaded that he had done no harm; but he was negligent and slothful, and, being an unprofitable servant, he was condemned to outer darkness!

In asserting, however, that indulgence in any known sin is incompatible with a scriptural hope in the Divine favor, I do not refer to those who live in lack of knowledge — though such, when their eye is opened, and their heart changed, mourn over their sins of ignorance; nor do I allude to the temptations of Christians: they are sometimes suddenly overcome, — though they humble and abhor themselves whenever thus surprised into sin, and are led to greater watchfulness and prayer. I have reference solely to known sins — to things neglected and things done which we know, and, whenever we can be induced to reflect with calmness, *feel*, to be wrong; and if the day is not far distant when “every one of us shall give account of himself to God,” no one can be too solicitous to ascertain how stands *his reckoning* with the high and holy One!

Is there an Herodias whom he will not put away? Then he denies God’s authority, and stands convicted

of deliberate rebellion against God ! Though he may be free from outward vices, or regular in his devotions, yet, if there is any sinful indulgence he will not forego—any cross he will not take up for Christ's sake—it is clear that he loves the interests of self more than the honor of Christ, and therefore cannot be his disciple. Nay, if there be one duty which he knowingly omits—one sin which he knowingly cherishes, this single commission, or that single omission—as the word of the Lord abideth—shall, except he repent, be his ruin ! It is an offending member ; and, if it be not cut off, it will cast him into hell !

To demur at this conclusion, is to convict one's self of being actuated by that carnal mind which is enmity against God—which, until renewed by the Spirit of God, is always pertinaciously reluctant to submit to his authority. Hence, it is as certain as that God is holy and man a sinner, either God must change or man submit. Though his sin be dear to him as “the apple of his eye,” he must put it away by repentance, or he cannot be saved.

THE DYING PENITENT.

IN the closing scene of our Saviour's life, various circumstances unite to render his death at once the most painful and humiliating. He is betrayed by a kiss—deserted by his friends—condemned by false witnesses. He is mocked, buffeted, scourged, spit upon—crowned with thorns—compelled to bear his own cross: and now, he is suspended on the cross between two malefactors, and thus held up to universal scorn.

But these circumstances of suffering and ignominy, as has been often observed, served to invest his person with transcendent radiance—to attest the divinity of his life, and the glory of his death. Meekness is opposed to insult, patience to suffering, and tenderness to cruelty. In proportion to the depth of his own woes, is his compassion for others—to the ignominy of the cross, is the grandeur of the victim—to the degradation of the man, is the exaltation of the God!

We are limited by our subject to a simple incident in connection with the Crucifixion; but this by itself were sufficient to rebuke all skepticism as to the claims of Jesus, and to induce a harmony of view in relation to the whole essential doctrine of the gospel. Nowhere else in the Past can we meet with a scene which, while

it appeals so forcibly to our sensibilities, conveys such precious truths and solemn warnings. If duly weighed, it must silence the cavilling, though it fail to convince; encourage the despairing, and alarm the procrastinating — strengthen the Christian's faith, and cheer his dying hour. Unlike the incidents in profane history, it has a relation to our spiritual interests and deathless aspirations; and though the former may awaken inquiries of moment to the philosophic mind, this opens a train of thought in keeping with the great end of God's Revelation to a fallen world — for it speaks to us of sin and of redemption, of penitence and of pardon, of faith and of works, of grace and glory.*

Here is one who had lived in sin; whose crimes had exposed him to capital punishment; who in the estimation of the people was less to be pitied than even Barabbas; who, according to his own acknowledgment, was justly condemned to death; and who at first probably joined with his companion in crime, and with the hardened Jews, in reviling Jesus.

Luke does not advert to this circumstance; but the other evangelists, after recording the vituperative language which the scribes and elders used toward the suffering Jesus, distinctly state that "the thieves also which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth." The manner in which this fact is spoken of by the different writers is, however, simply one of many instances which might be adduced in evidence, that they were guilty of no collusion; and it is this which secures to their respective narratives the strongest argument in

* Luke xxiii. 42, 43.

favor of their authenticity, that of substantial truth amid circumstantial variety.

To my mind, it is not improbable that this malefactor, whose case is so remarkable, was induced at first to accord with the sentiments of the chief-priests and elders, in the hope that they, from motives of party-spirit, would interpose in his behalf; and that while he was thus mocking Jesus, he was struck with the conviction that this man who hung by his side—suffering with so much patience, and praying for his murderers—was indeed the Son of God: as there have been occasional instances of wicked men being transfixed with remorse and dread, just as some horrid blasphemy had escaped their lips.

Some have supposed that the change in his mind was caused by the fear of death. But if that alone could have influenced his feelings, he would have awaked to a sense of his condition during the interval that elapsed between his sentence and his execution. The signs of true penitence are not to be looked for in the case of one who is undergoing the penalty of violated law.

Nor is it probable that his confession of guilt sprung from interested motives. It was too late to hope for a pardon; while his acknowledgment of Christ's innocence could have served only to exasperate his judges.

Or, that his confession was extorted by physical suffering, is a supposition equally unreasonable. His language is indicative of clear thought and dispassionate conviction. Realizing the justness of his punishment, he takes shame to himself for his crimes. Convinced of the Saviour's innocence, he rebukes the raillery of his companion—virtually saying to him, that, as they

are suffering the same punishment, they should compassionate one another ; that as he will shortly stand before God in judgment, it behooves him to think of other things than reviling an innocent man : “ Dost thou not fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation ? And we indeed justly ; for we receive the due reward of our deeds : but this man hath done nothing amiss.” And then, turning to Jesus, he said, “ Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom :” feeling himself to be unworthy of his regard, all he asks is, one kind remembrance ; that Christ would deign to think of him — a poor, lost sinner !

Here is an humble confession of guilt and ill desert ; a proper rebuke of iniquity ; an exhortation to a fellow-sinner to fear God and prepare to die ; a fearless vindication of Christ’s character ; a heartfelt homage to his majesty ; a perception of the spirituality of his kingdom, and confidence in his power to save. He who was condemned as a malefactor, and is now expiring amid the tortures of the crucifixion, feels and speaks as a Christian !

So striking is the moral change which he has undergone, that, unless we experience the same — no matter what has been our past character, however amiable our disposition and exemplary our conduct — we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven : for, “ except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” So decided are the evidences of his conversion to God, that unless we can present essentially the same, we have no scriptural reason for believing that we have been renewed by the Holy Spirit.

If, in his last hour, this man showed his faith by his works, it is evident that faith, under any circumstances, without works, is dead. He is as different from his former self as from his partner in condemnation. That heart so lately hardened by crime, is now dissolved in grief; those lips so lately filled with cursing and bitterness, now open in accents of confession. While the other blasphemes, he prays; while the other responds to the cruel mockings of the Jews, he fearlessly bears witness to the Saviour's innocence; while the other braves the thought of death and eternity, he feels his need of mercy, and humbly sues for a place in *his* remembrance who, with himself, is in a moment to give up the ghost!

Wonderful transformation! most mysterious faith! Throughout the evangelic records, I know of nothing that surprises me more than the conversion of this man; that under circumstances so adverse, he should exhibit such a power and reach of faith—such spirituality of mind!

What a spectacle this, for Christ's disciples!—to see one of the thieves that are crucified with him, brought to a sense of his sins—putting his trust in the Lord their God—longing for a better country, even a heavenly; and to see Christ, from the cross, “as from a throne, dispensing pardons, and disposing of seats in Paradise!”

But our imagination has ascribed to the disciples views and emotions to which they were strangers. Though they had walked with Jesus in sweet companionship, and hung on his lips of wisdom, and witnessed

his wonderful works, and seen him transfigured on the Mount, and heard a voice from the excellent glory, declaring him to be the Son of God ; though it had been repeatedly intimated to them that the Son of man would be betrayed and crucified, that by his resurrection he might be declared the Son of God with power ; though they had been cautioned against the fear of man, and strengthened against the day of trial ; and had even declared that they would be true to Christ : yet now — where are they ?

Among all who followed Jesus, not one is there to attest his innocence. Strange to tell, though so many had believed on him when they saw his mighty works, and had left all to follow him, yet the only one from whom Jesus hears a word in his behalf, is a dying thief ! The disciples have all fled. The moment Christ was led forth to be crucified, darkness, as of death, came over the prospects which had so lately ravished their hearts : they gave up all for lost ! Nor is this to be wondered at. What could have been so contrary to their views, and abhorrent from their feelings, as that he whom they had believed to be the Son of God, should be condemned as a culprit at Pilate's bar ? that he whom they had fondly hoped would redeem Israel, should be crucified between two thieves ? Methinks the idea might have been most naturally forced on their minds, that had he been indeed the Christ, he would have palsied the perjured tongues that witnessed against him, or withered the arm that was raised to nail him to the cross. To see their blessed Master the object of scorn, the victim of malice ! to think that God would permit

such an outrage on justice and humanity — his beloved Son to be thus by wicked hands crucified and slain! — must have been a trial to their faith of which we can form but a feeble conception.

But the thief, though he had been no follower of Christ, at once saw through the mystery of the cross, and beheld, in the victim of hellish cruelty, the Lamb of God! in the despised and deserted man, the Lord of glory! in the suffering, bleeding, dying Jesus, the true God and eternal life! Was faith ever more directly opposed to sense? Could faith be put to a severer trial, or effect a more resplendent triumph?

Moreover, the disciples had but little if any conception of a spiritual kingdom. In common with their nation, and notwithstanding Christ's instructions to them, they looked on the "Messiah that should come" as a temporal prince and deliverer: for this reason they, with the chief priests, might have thought that, had he been the promised Messiah, "he would have saved himself, and come down from the cross."

But the thief discerned at once the true nature of the kingdom of God: he knew that though Christ would not get down from the cross, he would come up from the dead. To his spiritual eye, he whom demons in human shape now execrate, will soon be adored by holiest angels: that reed will be exchanged for the sceptre of the universe; that platted crown of thorns, for the diadem of the skies; that ignominious cross, for a throne of eternal glory!

It was the sufferings of Christ that caused the disciples to doubt his Messiahship; and it was these same

sufferings, also, that led the thief to believe that Christ was indeed the Son of God—the King of Israel! Such patience under sufferings the most grievous; such meekness under injuries and insults the most wanton; such unrepining submission to the will of his heavenly Father; such irrepressible compassion for his enemies—such a prayer for their forgiveness!—surely this man is neither a malefactor nor an impostor. ‘No; though others may desert or revile thee, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of the most high God! Dying as I am, and justly for my crimes, I would trust my soul to thee. Tell me only that thou, Lord, wilt think of me when thou comest into thy kingdom, and I die in peace!’

How are we to account for this singular conversion? Will it be said that the thief was previously acquainted with Christ’s character, and with the design of his mission? Being a Jew, he might have had some general knowledge of the ancient prophecies of his nation respecting the coming Messiah; but while the faith of the disciples was staggered by the cross, is it probable that one who had never followed Jesus as the Christ, would suddenly recognise in a condemned and dying man—his fellow-sufferer on the cross—the subject of prophecy, and the fulfilment of the promise? Or, he might have heard of the doctrines which Christ had promulged, and of the miracles which he had wrought; but is it probable that a man of his character, whose associates must have been among the vilest of the people, had accredited any other reports respecting Christ than such as his enemies had circulated?

Giving, however, to these considerations all the weight which any might contend for, why had they not an equal influence over the feelings of the other thief? He also was a Jew, and had probably the same educational impressions, with equal facilities for ascertaining the truth.

Is it suggested that the one had more natural sensibility and more candor than the other? This might account for the penitent thief's acknowledgment of Christ's innocence, and his own compassion for suffering virtue—for his consciousness and confession of ill desert; but what connection there can be between any natural qualities, and a perception, under the circumstances in which he was placed, of Christ's divinity, together with implicit trust in his atoning mediation, and his ability to confer everlasting happiness, is too impalpable to be explained, if it could be apprehended.

The fact is, no external difference can be discerned in the relative position of these two malefactors; no advantage in the one case that was not enjoyed by the other; no obstacle to the one that did not equally oppose the conversion of the other. The same by birth and education—the same in crime and condemnation—the one could have had no national views in which the other did not share; no love of vice, no aversion from goodness, no recklessness of consequences, which did not naturally result from the habits of the other. Suspended on either side of the cross to which the Saviour was nailed, they both knew that their days were numbered; and the one as well as the other had the same opportunity of knowing that Jesus had done nothing amiss. If the one feared God, so might the other. If the

one confessed his sins, and felt his need of mercy—if he believed Christ to be the Lord of life, and believed on him with the heart unto righteousness—what was there to prevent the other? And yet, in neither case, was there any probability of unfeigned sorrow for sin,—much less of heartfelt faith in the suffering Jesus. Granting to both all those powers which constitute free moral agency; say that they both believed in a future state of rewards and punishments, and both felt how unprepared they were to die,—is it not abstractly most improbable that either of them, of himself, should turn to one who, like themselves, had been condemned as a malefactor—whom the Jews were insulting and deriding in every possible way—whose extremity of suffering and humiliation seemed to be a fearful refutation of his claims to the Messiahship—and embrace him as the Saviour of lost sinners?

Unable, therefore, to account for his conversion on secondary principles, we refer it directly to the interposition of Almighty grace. As we cannot doubt the truth of the narrative, no more can we hesitate to admit the hand of God in this conversion. In such a case, to withhold our credence in the special agency of his Holy Spirit—enlightening the mind of that poor thief with the knowledge of the truth, changing his heart, and fitting him for heaven—would be to do discredit to the inspired record.

There was nothing in the past life of the one, more than of the other, to recommend him to the favor of God. In neither case was there any claim on the Divine mercy: both had alike forfeited their lives, at once

to the law of man and to the law of God ; both, for their sins, deserved eternal death, as for their crimes they were legally suffering punishment. Had both died in their sins, neither could have impeached the justice of God ; and that one of two men, equally criminal, was in this, the last hour of his life, brought to repentance and faith, only serves to prove that “ God has mercy on whom he will have mercy.” Yes ; had it not been for the *grace of God*, that one, like his partner in crime, would have died reviling the meek and lowly Jesus.

Such an instance seems designed to teach us that the Gospel is a dispensation of grace ; that none of our fallen race have a claim on the mercy of God ; and that if any are saved, the praise of their salvation must redound to the riches of his grace through Jesus Christ.

From the adaptedness of God’s word and ordinances to the conversion of sinners, we are apt to ascribe to the means of grace an efficiency which belongs exclusively to a Divine agent : hence, some have denied the necessity of any special influence of God’s Spirit in man’s conversion—even as others, from the operation of second causes in the material world, have denied a particular providence. The ordinary course of events fails to arrest attention : it is only instances of an extraordinary nature that strike the mind, and these lead us at once and involuntarily to refer our unexpected deliverance from some temporal ill, or our unexpected success in life, to the beneficent interposition of a higher agency than man can exert. So, lest man should take the praise of his conversion to himself—that we might be led to adore *Him* as the author and finisher, as well

as the revealer of our faith—in the instance before us he has, as it were, drawn aside the veil which conceals from our view the ordinary operations of his Spirit, and disclosed *himself* to us, in all the fulness and freedom of his sovereign and omnipotent grace.

But how illustrious does Christ appear in *his answer* to the penitent's supplication! Let the skeptic calmly ask himself whether Jesus Christ, when he hung in ignominy and agony on the cross, could have ventured to pardon a dying malefactor, and to assure him that he should that day be with himself in Paradise, had he not been the co-eternal, co-equal Son of God. Under circumstances so trying to flesh and blood, so appalling to the heart of man, even when fortified by the consciousness of integrity, was it possible for him, unless indeed the Christ, to maintain the character which he had previously exhibited?

See the blessed Jesus!—his hands are spiked to the arms of that cross: a spear has been thrust into his side; and now his enemies wag their heads, and point at him the finger of scorn, and, with a hellish laugh, bid him save himself; or, bowing before him in mock obsequiousness, cry—"Hail, king of the Jews!"

Was there ever such an accumulation of woes on a being so innocent? Were fouler insults ever added to pain so excruciating? We cannot recall the treatment he received without feelings of the keenest indignation; and yet, amid all these circumstances, exasperating to the last degree, the innocent sufferer is neither roused to anger, nor dead to compassion.

To be unjustly condemned, yet to submit without a murmur ; to be mocked, yet to maintain the meekest silence ; to be dying in physical torture, yet to triumph over human weaknesses without betraying any insensibility ; to be crucified between two thieves, and to pray for the forgiveness of the one who reviled him, and to confer an assurance of immortal blessedness on the other who besought his remembrance—O ye who would do homage to GREATNESS, render it to the *crucified Jesus!*

In view of such a scene, who can doubt that Christ died for sinners? What but compassion for the souls of men, could have sustained him amid his sufferings, and borne him above insult and ignominy? In the agonies of his own death, to have communicated spiritual life, *who* is this, but the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth? For what end could he have stooped to earth, and taken the form of a servant, and exposed himself to suffering and the cross, but that man might be delivered from the bitter pains of eternal death? While pain racked his frame, and eyes bespeaking malicious joy stared him in the face—then, to have listened to the cry of penitence—O love ineffable, matchless, boundless, godlike! While all the powers of earth and hell seemed to triumph over him, his grace triumphed over sin and death!

But that God who displayed his sovereign mercy in the case of the thief on the cross, still reigns ; that Saviour who answered to his cry, now lives to intercede for sinners ; and that Spirit who brought him to feel his

need of mercy, still exercises his prerogative in bringing men to a sense of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. Every Christian has reason to admire the free grace of God in his own conversion; while there is scarce one who has not, at some period of his history, been rebuked for his presumption in limiting God's mercy. The clearer our views of the nature of sin, and the deeper our conviction of God's holiness and justice, the more apt are we to doubt the possibility of true repentance in the last hour of a life which had been devoted to the world. Yet such are the cases which God sometimes selects to show forth the exceeding fulness and freeness of his grace. Who would have anticipated the prodigal's return to his father? Who would have supposed that the blasphemous and persecuting Saul of Tarsus could obtain mercy? Much less, that a felon, while in the act of expiating his crimes by his life's blood, would obtain the promise of eternal life; while dying in shame and agony, be filled with joy unspeakable and full of glory! But so have I seen a youth brought to repentance, when he seemed to have been abandoned of God and lost to hope; and even the man of threescore years and ten, brought to hope in God's mercy, just as the near approach of death had awakened him to an appalling sense of his undone condition. We need not, however, multiply instances of the kind: God has proclaimed himself to be, and he is now, "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."

If, therefore, the most reckless have at times been arrested—if the grace of God has sometimes poured

the light and joy of heaven on the soul which but a moment since was transfixed with the dread of an unprepared eternity—how much more shall they receive mercy who are seeking Him sorrowing!

Every instance of conversion seems to intimate that neither wickedness can frustrate nor moralities conciliate His grace. To God must be ascribed all the glory of man's conversion. Hence, he who is given up by man, is sometimes received by God. Hence the instances where grace has triumphed in the last hour of a wicked life. Hence, the thoughtless worldling and the jeering infidel are often arrested, while the moralist and the formalist are in general left to their own righteousness.

If I am inclined to despair of any one, it is not of him whose mind is given up to the pursuits of the world, or whose heart has been seduced by the pleasures of sense; not of him whose life is deformed by vice, or whose crimes have even rendered him obnoxious to civil justice: it is of him rather who boasts of his moralities, and is hoping by his Pharisaism to recommend himself to the Divine favor.

Let me be called to visit the death-bed of any one rather than that of the self-righteous. Such a one will cling to the delusive mantle of his own weaving, and expect to be saved because he was an honest man, a good citizen, a kind neighbor, or an affectionate parent. It matters not how wicked may have been one's life—let me see him smitten with a sense of his sins, and hear him cry for *mercy*, even as a criminal pleading for his life, and I have hope concerning that poor sinner. Only let me see him at last relying with an humble, affectionate,

childlike reliance on the mercy of God through Jesus Christ, and I can believe that before the going down of his last sun on earth, his soul will be imparadised with Jesus.

Let it not be said that we disparage virtue and encourage vice. Remember the declaration of Christ himself: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." As it is difficult to insist on faith in Christ as the only ground of man's salvation, without giving occasion for the perversion of this doctrine—that the gospel tends to licentiousness—so is it equally difficult to extol the mercy and grace of God without giving occasion for unwarranted hopes—to guard the mind against despair, on the one hand, without leading to presumption on the other.

But this case constitutes an argument not less weighty against presumption during life, than despair in the hour of death. View it in whatever light, it is most peculiar. It was designed to honor an extraordinary occasion, and therefore cannot be legitimately viewed as a precedent. It was a moral miracle, wrought to attest the sovereignty and freeness of God's grace—the efficacy of Christ's atoning blood—the omnipotency of his saving arm; and therefore there can be deduced from it no encouragement whatever—not the shadow of a reason for delaying repentance to a dying hour. Like the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, though it proves that God may at any time arrest a sinner, and that no true penitent should at any time despair of the Divine forgiveness, yet it in no wise invalidates the necessity of using those means of grace which God has instituted; nor affords

any ground for the presumption that, in his own time and way, God will arrest the man who persists in despising his forbearance. Let it be recollected that Saul sinned "ignorantly in unbelief;" and that the dying thief had not knowingly rejected the Messiah, nor deliberately procrastinated repentance.

Moreover, it should be considered that, among all the conversions recorded in the Scriptures, this is the only instance of one having been brought to repentance in the last hour of his life. If this be the most suitable time, why were not other instances recorded? Why did the apostles preach to any, save the sick and the dying? Why so many cautions against delay?—so many solemn allusions to the shortness, the uncertainty of time—the danger of hardening the heart, of grieving the Spirit, of treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath, by despising the riches of God's goodness?—to the aggravated guilt of neglecting Christ's great salvation?

It is not surprising that but one instance is found in the word of God. Cases of the kind are so rare, that they may be regarded as strictly extraordinary. Worldly men, when brought down to the gates of death, do often think of the interests of their souls; but it is in general only to regret that they have neglected their inestimable privileges; it is to feel that, by procrastination, they have committed a mistake which may be irreparable—to awake to the conviction that the very time to which they postponed their repentance, is the most unsuitable time for a work on which such momentous consequences depend!

Be it so, that the dying sinner does sometimes betray no fear of death, and again that he expresses a willingness to die ; but these mental states may result from the influence of mortal disease on his faculties and sensibilities. Or admitting, as is sometimes the case, that he has found relief from his fears in prayer by consecrated lips, or in receiving the consecrated emblems of the Saviour's dying love—how different is such a preparation for death, from that *repentance* which leads a dying man to acknowledge his ill deserts, to deplore his sins, and deprecate the wrath of Heaven!—and, when convinced that there is mercy, even then to lay hold, with a trembling hand, on the hope which is set before him in the gospel! How wide the difference from *that faith* which fills the dying penitent with sentiments of gratitude, and love, and praise to God for his unmerited goodness ; which leads him to rejoice in the suitableness and all-sufficiency of a crucified Saviour—to exhort surrounding friends to make their peace with God, and prepare for the hour of their own departure—to give a testimony for Christ in the presence of former associates in wickedness—to look away from earth to that world whither Jesus has gone to prepare mansions for his followers, and to die with the assurance that heaven will be his eternal home!

What though the Scriptures inform us that a notorious offender obtained mercy in his dying hour—did he not give evidence which cannot be mistaken, of repentance and faith? Did not the Saviour, who knew the state of his heart, assure him of salvation? Repentance, then, at any time, is not a mere tear, or groan, or

‘God have mercy;’ faith is not mere indifference to life, or willingness to die; nor is it a mere assent of the lips. Before we can scripturally regard a sinner’s death-bed exercises as the fruits of God’s gracious Spirit, we must see substantially the same evidences of repentance and faith that the dying thief exhibited; but how seldom is this the case! And among those who unexpectedly recover from dangerous sickness, how often does it happen that he who seemed so penitent and believing, at once returns, with returning health, to the world which, on his sick-bed, he had solemnly renounced for God!

But admitting that the dying hour affords the most favorable opportunity for repentance—where one has then exhibited the evidences of faith in Jesus, how many have been smitten with some disease that at once precluded all exercise of thought; how many have showed blindness of mind and hardness of heart—have even died with blasphemies on their lips; how many, too, have been cut down in all their “full-blown sins,” without a moment’s warning! And because one has been saved from a wreck, shall another knowingly expose himself to the fury of the winds and waves? What infatuation, to part with the present for the uncertain future! In a world where death breaks in upon us at an unexpected moment, to put off the concerns of the soul to a dying hour!

Even though men should not be cut off suddenly, in general their death will correspond with their life. The mercy of God is not more to be admired in the case of one of the thieves, than is his justice to be dreaded from

the case of the other. If, from the one instance, I am encouraged to hope that a life of wickedness may end in a death of penitence—so, by the other, I am most powerfully impressed with the conviction, that, *as men live, so will they die*. Even from the first instance, I can have no belief in a dying man's conversion, unless he gives some evidence of his faith; and no heart to bid him hope in God's favor, if so be that he has deliberately postponed the work of repentance. Free as is the grace of God, that man may have sinned away his day of grace; and God may have left him—as he did the other thief on the cross—to die in his sins.

But unless that cross had been erected, in vain might man have repented of his sins, or reformed his life. Unable to satisfy the demands of justice, there could have been for him no deliverance from the curse of a violated law: and since Christ, by his death, has made atonement for the sin of the world, what more proper than that his sufferings for sinners should be made the means of their sorrow for sin? What can cover the shame of the cross, but that by it men should be led to abase themselves and exalt Christ? How proper that his humiliation should thus redound to his glory!

But what more effective instrumentality could be devised? We may be pointed to the glories of Paradise; but it can only serve to convince us what we have lost by sin—how unfitted we are for its abodes of purity: it cannot inspire us with hope; it may not even allure us, for the heart of fallen man knows no heaven above the world in which its affections centre. In contrast with heaven, we may be told of hell: but, though the

thought of such unmitigated woes may overwhelm us with fear, it cannot wake the source of penitential tears, nor move us to one act of cordial obedience. By such means, we cannot be led to right views of our own character, nor to proper sentiments toward God. We may be told that we are exposed to God's eternal wrath and curse: but we want the evidence that God so hates sin; or, if convinced of our sin and ill desert, we want to know how we may regain the favor of that holy God, and that there is hope even for the chief of sinners.

Hence the adaptedness of the gospel to man's character and condition as a fallen being. Nowhere else can we gather such affecting views of God's perfections, and such motives to repentance, as are embodied in the cross of Christ. See there the Lamb of God! For us those hands were transfixed—that side pierced; for us he endured those bitter taunts—those cruel scourgings, and bowed his head to the stroke of death! Yea, even that we might be delivered from the curse of the law, and restored to the Paradise which by our sins we had forfeited. Who can be unmoved by such a spectacle? Wondrous compassion—to suffer, and bleed, and die, for sins not his own! It was this thought that touched the flinty heart of that dying criminal, and encouraged him to breathe a prayer for mercy; it is this that has dissolved to penitence and inspired with trembling hope the heart of many a sinner equally guilty; and he who cannot be moved by the *love of a dying Saviour* to confess his sins and sue for mercy, may be already given over to a reprobate mind. It is vain to think that other

arguments can convince him of his guilt, or other motives woo him to godly sorrow. Like the other thief, by the very side of Jesus, he may seal his own damnation, and from the mount of Calvary go down to a seven-fold perdition! As that cross was rendered effectual to the salvation of one of the thieves, while it tended to the aggravated condemnation of the other, so surely is the gospel the savor of life unto life, or of death unto death.

We are apt to wonder that one of the thieves could revile the blessed Jesus—even shocked at such depravity. But what were his advantages for knowing Christ, compared with the advantages of men at the present day, before whom Christ is often “set forth crucified,” and who are so often urged and entreated even by his “cross and passion,” to repent of their sins? How much greater, then, must be their guilt—since, by their impenitence, they virtually sanction the treatment which Christ received from this malefactor!

Such, however, in general admit the Divine authority of his mission, and mean at some time to seek his mercy: with their last breath they hope to commit themselves to the arms of his love! Not for all worlds would they die without an interest in Christ! Yes; they think they can live without him: but, knowing that they cannot safely die without him, they mean to confess him, though not now, yet in time, they hope, to secure their safety! But what can equal such ingratitude, save the folly of such a decision? What! may one live to the world until he can no longer retain it, and then ask for a place in heaven? With hardly less hazard to his immortal

interests, hardly less presumption, might he determine to postpone repentance until he stands a naked spirit before the judgment-seat of Christ! If he will then say to many, "*Depart from me*"—though they may have eaten and drunk in his presence, prophesied in his name, and in his name done many wonderful works, how can any man on his death-bed presume on the mercy which all his life long he had rejected?

Though Christ did remember the dying thief, that case may rise up in judgment to condemn the impenitent hearer of the gospel. The first time that he heard the gospel, he believed: year after year has the latter heard both its invitations and its warnings, and yet never has he dropped a tear in view of the Saviour's sufferings—never breathed a prayer at the foot of the cross—never remembered his sayings to do them, his example to imitate it, his dying love to celebrate it at his table!

Most melancholy is it to think that dying sinners can be so carried away by the things of this vain world as to procrastinate compliance with the claims of such a Saviour, and thereby expose themselves to his final rejection! What is so needful for us as a place in Christ's remembrance? What are the regards of the creature, what the treasures and honors of the world, compared with this? What will it profit me that I have gathered up riches, if riches can neither console me in sorrow, nor succor me at death? What will it avail that my name lives in the annals of a nation, when my body is food for worms? What are even the remembrances of friends, if they must soon follow me to the house appointed for all living?

Is not this the infancy of my immortal existence—this a vale of tears and a state of trial? Beyond the grave, is there not a solemn judgment and a dread eternity? How imperious the wants of my moral being! how momentous the interests of my soul! And who, in my afflictions, can cheer me, if Christ be absent? who, in my death-struggle, can succor me, if Christ forget me? How shall I stand in the judgment, if my name be not written in the book of his remembrance? Glorious tidings of great joy, that he died to live forever! that he has gone before to prepare mansions for his followers!

Let me live in daily remembrance of Him who loved me, and gave himself for me; and when my last hour is come—when skill is baffled, and friends can only weep around my couch, and coldness is creeping through my frame, and the light of life leaving my eyes, and I feel myself throttled by the “King of Terrors,” and know that in a moment I must part with earth, and go down alone into the dark grave, never more to return—then, *Lord, remember me.*

And when the sepulchres are bursting, and the dead are starting to life at the sound of the archangel’s trump, and the judgment is set, and the books are opened, and the Judge comes forth, clothed with righteousness and armed with omnipotence; and I find myself of the number of those who, according to their works, are to be allotted to happiness or woe forever; and *feel myself to be a sinner*, without the power to escape or the tongue to speak—O! then, *remember me!*

Through life’s pilgrimage, all I ask is, a place in *thy*

remembrance ; and in the hour of death, though the world forget me, and friends desert me, and my bed be made in poverty, and my body racked by pain, give me but thy faintest smile, and I *die happy* !

THE DESPONDING DISCIPLES.

THE crowd that gathered round the cross of the innocent sufferer, had dispersed ; and even they who, but a few days since, were bound together by a common faith, are now scattered, like sheep without a shepherd. With the last breath of the expiring victim, expired their hopes ! What a gloom must have settled over their minds, as the approach of night warned them to retire from Calvary !

But among those who had witnessed the crucifixion, we may designate two men who are returning to their home at Emmaus, a neighboring village, about seven miles from Jerusalem. But little is known respecting them. The probability is, that they had seen Jesus, listened to his teachings, and witnessed his works, and thence been led to regard him as the Messiah ; but the crucifixion staggered their faith and dashed their hopes.

In this state of mind, dejected and melancholy, they are returning whence they came—very naturally conversing of their previous views and feelings, in connection with the scenes they had so recently witnessed. They had not journeyed far, when a person accosted them and inquired the subject of their conversation, or the cause of their sadness—their dejected countenances

being a sufficient apology, if one were needed, for such an intrusion.

Astonished that any one should be unacquainted with an event of so recent occurrence, and which had thrown the whole city into a state of unwonted excitement, they concluded that he was a stranger ; and accordingly, with all that simplicity and brevity of speech which characterize deep emotion, they began to tell him of " Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people : and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered him to be condemned to death, and have crucified him : " and how they " trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel : and besides all this, " said they, " to-day is the third day since these things were done. " *

But he, instead of expressing either surprise at their statement, or sympathy with their feelings, immediately reproached † them for not seeing, in the events to which they had referred, what had been clearly predicted in their own Scriptures ; and then beginning his discourse, he explained to them from Moses and the prophets the things that had recently taken place in Jerusalem : how that their notions were not in accordance with the Scriptures ; that, agreeably to the intimations of ancient prophecy, the Messiah must suffer ; and that therefore the death of Christ was in fact no argument that he was not the long-promised deliverer of Israel.

* Luke xxiv. 13-32.

† The term *fool* in this connection is not to be viewed as an expression of contempt, but simply as an appropriate epithet for their *dulness* in not having perceived the drift of the prophetic writings ; or their *thoughtlessness* in not having understood that the Messiah must die and rise again.

Thus conversing, they reached the village ; but their travelling companion seemed to them to be going farther, and therefore they constrained him to stop a while, and to participate their hospitality—so pleased and edified had they been with his conversation, and so reluctant were they to lose the benefit of his company. Accordingly, he went in to sup with them ; and while they sat at meat—strange ! he undertook the office of the master of the feast : he “took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them”—thus reminding them, in the most unaffected and touching manner, of the authority, the love, the gesture, the mien, of Him whose death they bemoaned. Perhaps, as he raised his hands to heaven, in invocation of a blessing on the food, they observed the *prints of the nails*.

Then they recognised him, and saw clearly that he was risen, and was indeed that very Messiah whom they had so fondly hoped would redeem Israel. But as they recognised him, he, availing himself of the moment of their surprise and joy, suddenly departed, leaving them to recall his instructions by the way, and, by consequence, the impressions which his words had made on their minds and hearts : ‘Strange, that we did not know him ! “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?”’

Here, then, is a specimen of the nature of that evidence which may be adduced in favor of Christ’s resurrection. It is, as it were, one link in that chain of proofs by which this event is placed beyond all reasonable doubt. Here are two witnesses, alike competent

and dispassionate, and testifying under circumstances which cannot be explained with either the supposition that they meant to deceive, or were themselves deceived. Be it considered, that, whatever their former views and expectations might have been, the door of the sepulchre closed on their hopes when it enclosed the body of the crucified Jesus ; that they were returning to the place of their abode with heavy hearts—and the more despondent, as the prospect of their deliverance from Roman bondage, which had so lately seemed to dawn on their vision, was now shrouded in darkness : so erroneous was their conception of the Messiah's kingdom, and so imperfect their acquaintance with the true import of the prophetic Scriptures. Though there was every inducement for them—as they had previously acknowledged him, and been known as his disciples—to believe that Christ would rise from the dead ; though the third day, specified in his predictions as the time of his resurrection, was past ; though they had just heard the report of the women who had gone early on the morning of the third day to the sepulchre, that the body was not there, and that the angels whom they saw there had said that Christ was alive again—still, they were not only skeptical, but despondent.

Being in such a state of mind, it is not surprising that they did not know who it was that accosted them. They were not expecting to see Jesus ; they did not believe that he was alive ; and it required the strongest evidence to convince them that he had risen from the dead—nothing short, indeed, of the evidence of their senses : and, though they had been interested in his

conversation, and enlightened by his exposition of the prophecies, they had not the remotest idea that the stranger who had joined them was indeed the risen Jesus, until, while they were intent on the duties of hospitality to their guest, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them—as Jesus himself had done in the company of his disciples, previous to his crucifixion! Such a circumstance was the more significant, as it was wholly unexpected. It roused them from the stupor into which they had been thrown by Christ's death, and in a moment riveted their eyes in scrutinizing wonder on the lineaments of their guest. 'We cannot be mistaken; no, it is *He*, the crucified Jesus!—But he has gone!—and yet we cannot doubt—we have *seen* him! he is certainly risen, as he said.'

Such were the circumstances under which they recognised him, and such their convictions; and the proof of their having been thoroughly satisfied that they had really seen Jesus, is found in the fact that the *same* hour, though already fatigued with walking, they returned to Jerusalem; and finding the eleven together, told them how Jesus had met them and conversed with them by the way, and how he was known to them in the breaking of bread.

Nor could they have been deceived as to the person who had met them—unless we may suppose that the woman of Samaria could have failed to recognise him with whom she had conversed at the well of Jacob; or the sisters of Lazarus, him who had raised their brother from the grave;—unless Mary herself labored under an illusion when she exclaimed, "Rabboni!" or Thomas,

when he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" They had known him, and often listened with rapt attention to his teachings, and even embraced him as the Messiah; and the fact that they did not recognise him before, was owing either to his having presented at first a different appearance, or that they were no more expecting to meet him again than we are the friend whom, a few days since, we saw dead and buried.

Who but Christ himself would have accosted them at that time, or could have conversed with them in such a manner? Though it might have been a stranger attracted by their earnest conversation, and curious to know what had occurred in the city, yet it is not probable that an utter stranger to Jerusalem would have shown such profound knowledge of the Jewish Scriptures: or, though it might have been some one of the disciples with whom they had no acquaintance, yet all the disciples, for aught we know to the contrary, were equally disappointed, and equally in the dark respecting the nature of that deliverance which Christ had come to accomplish. But he who met them in the way was no stranger to what had taken place in the city; nor was he a stranger to Moses and the prophets: and, so far from expressing surprise or wonder as a stranger would have done, or sympathizing with their views and feelings as any disciple would, he at once reproved them for their ignorance and disbelief of God's word. He proved to them that there was a necessity for Christ's sufferings, if not on the ground that God "might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus," yet clearly from the fact that his sufferings had been

predicted ; and then, by explaining the prophetic parts of Scripture, he satisfied their minds that the things which had come to pass, and which they bemoaned, were in exact fulfilment of all the prophecies respecting the promised Messiah : he walked along with them while thus instructing and interesting them ; he would have gone beyond the village, but they constrained him to tarry with them ; he went into their house to sup with them, and reclined at meat with them, and broke the bread, and asked the Divine blessing, in their presence ; and if such circumstances do not furnish sufficient evidence that he who met them was a real personage, no evidence can establish the fact : a hundred witnesses under such circumstances were no better than these two.

The question then turns on the authenticity of the narrative. But if it be not authentic, how can we account for the fact that they should have put into the mouth of a stranger to them, an exposition and application of those ancient prophecies of which they themselves were ignorant—and at the very time, too, when they had surrendered their own minds to doubt and despair ? All this must have been a fabrication of theirs, if Jesus Christ did not accost them, and so converse with them : or, if the narrative had been written by an impostor, why should he have recorded, to their disparagement, the obtuseness of the disciples themselves as to the plain import of their own Scriptures ? But how is it possible that an impostor should have written a narrative which is at once so simple, so tender, and so true to nature ?

How natural that the disciples, after witnessing the

death and burial of their Lord, should abandon all hopes of the cause which they had espoused ; that, on leaving the city, they should carry with them a sad heart ; that the things which had occurred should be the burden of their conversation ; and that they should conclude, as a matter of course, that he who had not heard of Christ's tragic end, could not have been long in Jerusalem ! And then, the manner in which they replied to Christ's inquiry indicates just such a state of mind as we might suppose to exist under the circumstances in which they were placed : not calm and collected, but agitated and perplexed. There was so much that was remarkable about him whom the Jews had put to death ; so much evidence that he was the Messiah of promise : how benign his aspect ! how lovely his life ! how pure his benevolence ! What words of wisdom fell from his lips ! what stupendous and gracious miracles were wrought by him ! — ‘ But then the chief priests had condemned him and caused him to be crucified ; and even our rulers lent their countenance to the bloody deed : and now, he is no more ! though we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel. And besides all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done !’ Every thing had taken place contrary to their expectations and fondest hopes ; yet the wonders did not cease : “ Certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre ; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them that were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women

had said : but him they saw not :”—thus stating what they had seen and heard, in the simplest order of local suggestion ; but knowing not what to think, much less to believe : and, though last, not least, the manner in which they listened to his discourse—like men intent on solving a mystery ; their constraining him to tarry with them—being naturally reluctant to part with one so soon whose conversation had already served, in a degree, to relieve their agitated minds ; and, above all, their mutual and involuntary remark on his sudden departure—denoting as it did the deep interest and pleasure which they had felt in his discourse, before they knew who he was ; and thus led to recall his words—words which reached their heart when they were uttered, and which they now wonder had not led before to their recognition of him who was wont to speak as never man spoke.

Imagine, reader, that you had been one of the followers of Jesus : how would you have felt when you turned away from the cross on which he was crucified between two malefactors—or from the sepulchre where he was laid, and against the door of which the great stone had been rolled ? When you bent your steps homeward, and recalled the fondest hopes you had ever cherished, then blasted—think you that a tear would not have dropped from your eye ?—though surprised that any one so near the city could be ignorant of what had happened, that you would not have listened with the intensest interest to any scriptural explanation of recent events ?—and if you had at last found in your unknown companion your lost Messiah, would you not have recalled

his words with ineffable delight, and forthwith returned and communicated the joyful tidings?

If, then, the style of the narrative proves that the occurrences which it embodies were taken from real life, it follows that Jesus Christ did indeed rise from the dead.

The two disciples had often read their Scriptures, and they believed in a Messiah who should come; but it had never entered their thoughts that he would be subject to sufferings and to death: and the reason is found in the fact that their erroneous preconceptions of the nature of Christ's kingdom had served to obscure, in their view, the meaning of prophecy. So impressed had they been with the notion of a temporal deliverer, that, notwithstanding all Christ's prophetic allusions to his own death, that event, as we have seen, threw them into despair; nor until their eyes were opened to understand the Scriptures, did they know that Christ must needs suffer. And thus it is now—that prejudice often obscures or perverts the plainest doctrines. The desire also of finding something, or of proving that to be scripturally true, which will favor their worldly views, or at least not interfere with their worldly pursuits and gratifications, often perverts the judgment, and even enlists the decisions of the speculative understanding. How else can we account for the fact that some should be so blind to the doctrine of Christ's divinity, and of spiritual regeneration, as well as to that of future punishment? In some instances, as was the case with the disciples to a great extent, the prejudices of education tend to preclude a knowledge of the plainest truths in God's word.

Hence, some have no other idea of religion than adherence to a particular form of the church, or the observance of forms and ceremonies ; nor are such ever brought to a knowledge of the truth until, in the providence of God, the Scriptures are properly explained to them, and brought to bear in all their convincing power on the heart and conscience.

Thus, Ananias was the instrument, in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ, of enlightening Saul's darkened mind, and of leading him unto the way of salvation. So Philip, by explaining the prophecy of Esaias to the bewildered Ethiopian, was the instrument of leading him to the knowledge of Christ. It is remarkable that a man of his authority under Candace, while on his return from Jerusalem, whither he had been to worship, should have been reading the passage—"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter ; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth : " but had not Philip begun at the same Scripture, and *preached unto him Jesus*, he would not have gone on his way rejoicing in having found the Messiah ! In like manner, had it not been for the providential visit of Staupitz to the convent of Erfurth, Luther, notwithstanding his convictions of sin, and longings after purity and peace, might have died the wretched victim of monkish superstitions. "Look to the wounds of Jesus," said his instructor and guide ; "to the blood which he has shed for you : it is there you will see the mercy of God. Instead of torturing yourself for your faults, cast yourself into the arms of your Redeemer. Trust in him—in the righteousness of his life, in the expiatory sacrifice of

his death.”* He did ; and from that time light broke in upon his darkness, and the peace of God began to flow in upon his heart.

Though cast down and sorrowful, the two disciples, as they walked along, communed with each other—thus interchanging their sentiments, and aiming to arrive at some scriptural conclusion on which their hearts could rest : and as surely as Christ met them, and by his expositions enabled them to understand the Scriptures—so surely will he meet those, by his word and Spirit, who are seen walking in the path of humble, diligent, and prayerful inquiry. It is not that truth is obscure, or difficult to be understood, that so few acquire a knowledge of what the Scriptures teach ; it is because the many have neither a love nor a desire for the truth ; that they are blinded by their prejudices or wedded to their lusts ; do not seek to know the mind and will of the Spirit ; or, when they seek, bring to the inquiry all the pride, and worldliness, and unsubmission of the carnal mind. “No man cometh unto the Father but by me,” said Christ : no man can attain unto the true knowledge of God, except through the medium of the gospel of Christ. They who have sought Christ, have been brought to the knowledge of God ; and whenever any one, through the consciousness of his own sinfulness and need of a Saviour, seeks to know Christ, then God shines into his heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of himself in the face of Jesus Christ.

It will be recollected that our Saviour, in reply to the disciples, expounded to them, from Moses and the

* Merle's History, vol. i, p. 150.

prophets, the things concerning himself : showing them that those very sufferings to which Christ had been subjected, so far from constituting a just presumption against his Messiahship, were in fulfilment of their own scriptural prophecies respecting the coming Messiah ; that, in consequence of his having been crucified, Jesus would be declared to be *the Christ* of whom the seers of Israel had sung—to whom the Mosaic ritual referred—and who was shadowed forth in every sacrifice of old, being the promised seed of the woman who should bruise the head of the serpent.

Had Christ discovered himself to the disciples when he first met them, wonder and astonishment would have taken the place of reason and judgment ; and when he left them, they might have relapsed again into skepticism and despondency. If they had retained a distinct impression of his appearance, and been satisfied in their own minds that they had seen the risen Jesus, they would not have been able to satisfy others that they had not mistaken some one else for Christ himself, or labored under an optical illusion ; but, by expounding the Scriptures to them, he *convinced their reason*, and thus prepared them for the testimony of their senses. It was a proceeding worthy of Him who “ did all things well ” — as though by so doing he had designed, not merely to establish these disciples in the faith of his resurrection, but to teach all his followers that they should be “ able to give a reason ” for their faith and hope ; that his claims on our belief are founded in reason and truth ; that we are to believe, not on the ground of our senses, but on the testimony of God’s word. This word is now

to us as he was to the two disciples : and as he prepared them for the revelation of himself, so, by his word and Spirit, is he preparing his followers for the full and final revelation of his glorious perfections. He will yet be found of them that seek him, and admired of them that believe.

There is an intimate connection between knowledge and faith, reason and hope ; and, as one's interest in searching the Scriptures, such is the probability of his speedily finding Him of whom Moses wrote.

From our Lord's expounding to the disciples the things recorded in their Scriptures concerning himself, it follows that the Hebrew Scriptures proceeded from God. Indeed, the most decisive proof of the inspiration of the Old Testament is derived from the New. Paul unquestionably regarded the Hebrew Scriptures as of Divine authority, or he could not have said to Timothy—"From a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." With express reference to them he said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God ;" while Luke says that "God spake by the mouth of his holy prophets ;" and Peter, that "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." But our Saviour's declaration, as recorded by Luke,* is of itself conclusive : "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." Hence, whatever allusions

* Chap. xxiv. 44.

may be found in the ancient Scriptures to the Messiah, refer to him who was crucified.

Here there is no room for mistake, no ground for doubt. We know that He in whom we believe was “the hope of the promise made of God unto the fathers;” that he is the Divine personage who *should come* in “the fulness of time,” and be “wounded for our transgressions,” and “bruised for our iniquities;” and, by consequence, that he is “The mighty God”—“The Prince of Peace!”

It is only through the medium of the Old Testament, that Christ can be found in the New; and, separate from the ancient Scriptures, there can be no true and proper understanding of the nature and design of his death. There is, therefore, an inseparable and indispensable connection between these dispensations. If there is not, it is impossible to explain, not only the phenomena of the Christian dispensation, but the extraordinary circumstance that God should have withdrawn himself from a nation which he had expressly selected, and to which he had exclusively made known his will.

Whatever proofs may be adduced in favor of the Divine legation of Moses, we cannot believe in him, if his economy was neither preceded nor succeeded by other revelations of the Divine mind; and, by parity of reasoning—whatever evidences may accompany the claims of Jesus—we cannot believe in him as the Messiah, if we can discover no necessity for his sufferings. But what are the facts? Three periods—from the creation down to the present—occupied by three successive dispensations; all alike referable to a common

origin ; all having a mutual connection by virtue of the same grand and harmonious scheme ; all centring in the same extraordinary and mysterious personage, and pursuing the same purpose, though by diversity of means, through each successive period : the one dispensation preparing the way for the other, and both these terminating in the Christian ; and all alike growing out of the fact of man's original apostasy, and God's consequent promise of a Redeemer. Apart from these facts, no one can answer the question, why Christ must needs have suffered. Admit them, and there can be but one true system of religion for the world, and no religion can be of God which has not reference to Him who was announced immediately after the fall of man.

The only difference between us and holy men of old is this : they looked forward to Him who should come to take away sin by the sacrifice of himself : we look back to the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world. And who shall say that Abel had not as strong a faith in Christ when he offered the firstlings of his flock, as John had when he saw, in the fact that not a bone of Jesus had been broken, the exact fulfilment of prophecy ? as Abraham had when, by offering up his son, he dramatized the sacrifice of the Son of God ? as Paul had when he said, " He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world ! "

The intelligent and devout Israelite at the passover could hardly have differed in any thing essential to true and acceptable faith in the Messiah, from the worthy

recipient of the body and blood of Christ. Who is Christ, but the great antitypical Lamb? and what is the Lord's supper, but the Christian passover? Certain it is, that there is a marked correspondence in these respects between the Old and New Testaments: our ordinances correspond; and the facts which we accredit as constituting the historical basis of Christianity, must all be rejected before it may be denied that they are in fulfilment of ancient prophecy. The disciples were staggered by the events of Calvary; but Isaiah—when he stood on the mount of prophetic vision—foresaw the sufferings of the Messiah, and the glory that should follow.

“O fools and slow of heart to believe,” said the risen Jesus to the perplexed and dejected disciples; ‘your own Scriptures might have taught you better than to doubt the divinity of Christ’s mission because he was despised and rejected of men, or to despair because he was buffeted, and scourged, and put to a cruel death.’—“Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?”

If Christ could thus reprove the dulness and unbelief of his disciples, with how much more propriety—since he himself has furnished us with a key to the prophetic Scriptures—may it be said to those at the present day who reject the atonement and the divinity of the Son of God: ‘O fools and slow of heart to believe what the Lord Jesus Christ has rendered plain even to the comprehension of a child, and certain beyond the possibility of scriptural disproof!’

But what a privilege to have had Christ for a teacher

—Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge!—to have hung on *his* lips who never spake but to instruct the ignorant, to reclaim the erring, and cheer the sorrowing, or to expose hypocrisy and rebuke unbelief; Christ, who always spake as “the Father gave him commandment;” and who could end his discourses—replete as they are with the most wonderful announcements—and say, “These are the true sayings of God;” and as he spoke, the winds and waves ceased to rage—the palsied sick took up their bed and walked—the blind received their sight—and the dead came forth to life!

It is no wonder, though their eyes were holden that they should not know him, that such a teacher made all things plain and clear to the disciples; that his words not only enlightened their minds, but warmed their hearts. The words of Jesus! they are spirit and they are life! And though he has entered into his glory, yet has he often spoken to his followers by his word and Spirit; and have not their hearts as often burned within them?

Never is the Christian’s heart so drawn out in emotions of holy love, as when he is contemplating the lineaments of Jesus—his humility, his meekness, his patience, his devotion to his Father’s will, his weeping, untiring benevolence, and the loveliness of his spotless example; or when he is seated at the table of his dying love, and hears the Master saying, “This is my body broken for you.” When thus communing with Jesus, how often has his word seemed to them “sweeter than honey or the honey-comb;” how often have they been

melted to tears of blending gratitude and penitence ; inspired with a glowing zeal in his service, and sometimes been “ in a strait betwixt two, knowing that it were better to depart and be with Christ ! ”

Author and Finisher of the faith once delivered to the saints ! be thou all our salvation and all our desire.

What a religion is ours ! Let those who know not God, and Jesus Christ, whom he has sent, laud their cold philosophy, and worship the abstractions of intellect ; and they who would quiet their fears of an hereafter without renouncing the world, let such rest in their heartless rationalism, or their lifeless forms. Give me a religion that makes its way to my heart ; that will dissolve me to tears of penitence for my sins, and fill me with love to Him who loved me and gave himself for me ; that will make me more weary of the world, and long more ardently for the purity and peace of heaven !

Let him who would instruct me in the way of salvation, trifle not with my spiritual wants by his empty words, or vain theories and irrelevant discourses : let him teach me out of the lively oracles of God. If he would do me good, let him make me humble, grateful, prayerful, and devoted : let him *preach the gospel*, not in the words that man’s wisdom teacheth, but in the words that the Holy Ghost teacheth ! Ay ; and if he would not lead me to mock God, or ruin my own precious soul, let him so preach “ Christ and him crucified,” that when I go to the table of Jesus, I go not with either the cold heart of the formalist, or the vapid sentimentalism of the spell-bound devotee, but with the penitent, grateful, lively sentiments of the believer ; that I

may see the Master of the feast, and think of Christ, and love Christ, and commune with Christ, and feed by faith upon his atoning sacrifice ; and that the recollection of having been with Jesus may cause my heart to burn within me, and constrain me to make known to others — by my walk and conversation, my spiritual joys, and purifying hope, and earnest longings after God and heaven — the *fact* and the *power of his resurrection* !

THE FIRST GENTILE CONVERT.

CHRISTIANITY is the religion of our birth. We have grown up amid its temples, its institutions, its benign and elevating influences. That indifference which is consequent on familiarity, is apt to render us thoughtless of its origin, and regardless of its benefits. Yet there was a time when Christianity was not known—when, with the sole exception of Judea, paganism, in some one of its degrading forms, was the religion of every nation on the globe.

Wondrous change! We are wont to go back and contemplate the mutations which have taken place in society; and it is curious to reflect on the progress of nations from barbarism to civilization—emerging, as it were, from the horrors of a wilderness to the enjoyment of a landscape enriched by agriculture, and adorned by art—of a community supplied by industry, elevated by intelligence, and protected by law. But all our researches into the early condition of countries and nations are of trivial moment, compared with the inquiry as to the origin of practical Christianity in the gentile world.

It might have been supposed that Christianity would have selected its first convert from amid the ranks of philosophers; but this was not the case. Professing themselves wise, they were left to work out a fuller

demonstration that “the world by wisdom knew not God.” Shall we look, then, among the pagan priests for the first convert? Conscious that their own religion was a cheat, they were only the more hostile to a faith which endangered their selfish gains; while the people at large were degraded by ignorance, deformed by vice, and inflamed by national prejudice. But how much greater the honor, had Christianity, at the outset, triumphantly invaded the pride of philosophy, the bigotry of priestcraft, or the sensualism and idolatry of the throng! So it may seem to us; but the first to whom the gospel was sent, was a man who seemed to be, than any other *less* in need of Divine direction and mercy.

We might have supposed, moreover, that this conversion would have been effected through the instrumentality of the apostles; that, in obedience to the last command of their Lord and Master, they would have gone forth preaching the gospel to the Gentiles: but, notwithstanding Christ’s injunction, it is doubtful whether their minds would have been so speedily disabused of the prejudices of their birth. Supernatural agency was required, before the “middle wall of partition” between the Jew and the Gentile would be broken down; and, as an angel had been sent to Mary to announce the coming Saviour, so an angel was sent to Cornelius to announce the way of salvation.

It is very remarkable that the first gentile convert should have been apprehended by God’s holy Spirit from amid the ranks of a profession which had been the curse of the world; which had subjugated nations to individual pride and ambition, deified warriors and

heroes, lent its support to despotism, cruelty, injustice, and crime; enslaved minds, and sacrificed the lives of countless beings; and which was destined to overturn the temple and city of the Jews. When Rome was about to send forth her legions to pollute and destroy the holy of holies, God sent forth his Spirit to arrest a Roman centurion as the first fruits of Christianity!

It is difficult to divine the reason for this selection. It may have been to intimate that, though the Roman arms would overrun Judea, the Christian religion should overspread the world; that the profession which had promoted wars, should be rendered subservient to the spread of the gospel of peace; that He who could apprehend a centurion, would control the movements of Titus and his legions; that the spirit and courage of a soldier would be needed by every one who should follow Christ among the Gentiles. It might have been to convince the Jews themselves that the middle wall must indeed be broken down, when the prayers and alms of a gentile soldier were accepted before God; or to convince the wise men among the Gentiles, that the attainments of philosophy are no recommendations to the Divine favor.

As fishermen were selected to humble the pride of the Jew, so might Cornelius have been to rebuke their bigotry. As fishermen had been called to rebuke the arrogance of human wisdom, so might the soldier have been arrested to abash the pretensions of priestcraft. In the conversion of Saul, we see the triumph of Christianity over Judaism; in that of Cornelius, its triumph over Deism.

Moreover, the conversion of such a man as Cornelius

may have been designed to intimate the connection between the principles of Deism and those of Christianity ; that a certain preparation of mind and heart is necessary to the cordial reception of the gospel ; that no acts of devotion, no good works, can insure heaven, except through Jesus Christ—thus ministering a rebuke alike to the Jew and to the Gentile ; and, finally, that no employment—not even the military profession—is inconsistent with the practical reception of the gospel. Nor, indeed, is any one occupation in life more favorable than another to the exercise of true religion. There may be bad men among ministers of the gospel, and good men among soldiers. The statesman may be as truly religious as the preacher ; and each and every man, in his sphere of secular business, may alike serve God and be accepted of him. This is the great peculiarity of the gospel. It does not require us to go out of the world, or to desert our post in society—much less to neglect our calling for temporal subsistence. ‘ If thou acceptest the terms of discipleship,’ says its spirit, ‘ I will accompany thee to the hall, the office, the workshop, the mine ; even in the tented battle-field—if thou appearest there in the just cause of thy country—thou shalt find thy Saviour. Nay, I will never leave nor forsake thee, unless thou prove false to God, to thy race, and to thyself !’

It is not stated whether Cornelius, after his conversion, abandoned the military profession : possibly he might have thought that he could not do all that was required of him, by superior authority, without violating the dictates of an enlightened conscience ; or that, by

now retaining his profession, he might be exposing himself to temptations beyond his strength.

Be this as it may, all we know positively is, that he was the commander of a division in the Roman army—a division composed chiefly of soldiers from Italy, and thence called the “Italian Band ;” and the place in which he was stationed was Cæsarea—so designated in honor of Augustus Cæsar, and situated on the coast of the Mediterranean, about sixty-two miles northwest of Jerusalem. From his official relations, in connection with his Latin name, we are led to infer that Cornelius was a Roman ; and, though some commentators have thought that he was a Jewish proselyte, or a proselyte of the gate, they have overlooked. it would seem, the several facts that Peter himself regarded Cornelius as a foreigner, and that the apostles contended with Peter, on his return to Jerusalem, for having preached the gospel to a Gentile. The presumption that Cornelius must have been of Jewish birth, because he was a devout man, has its origin in the same mental habitude which rendered it difficult for Peter to conceive how that could be cleansed which he had always regarded as common and unclean. Because a nation may be immersed in heathenish darkness, it does not follow that no individual mind within its limits has any glimpses of truth and right. With as much propriety might we conclude, from the fact that the greater proportion in Christendom are mere nominal believers, there are no true Christians. It might be found that there are among the heathen the same grades of intelligence and morality which we find in Christian lands ; it may be, as many pagans living up to the light

which they enjoy, as Christians to their superior lights and privileges. If we can believe that, long before the advent of the Messiah, there lived a man in Athens who eschewed the popular superstitions, and, while surrounded by pantheists and sensualists, aimed to render to the Supreme Being the homage of a spiritual worship and of a pure life—still less incredible is it that there was at Cæsarea, in the days of the apostles, a devout worshipper of the true God. In what way such a man was taught the evils of idolatry, and the necessity of a religion of the heart—whether by the unaided exercise of reason, by the aid of tradition, or by some incidental acquaintance with the principles of Revelation—it is difficult to decide ; but not more difficult than to account for the manner in which, here and there, some obscure person came to the heartfelt knowledge of the faith in Christ, years before Germany awoke from the long night of papal superstition. As, at the era of the Reformation, there were individuals who, without any known advantages, without ever having seen the Bible, were prepared to receive the tidings of great joy—so may we suppose that, at the time to which we allude, God, having broken down the middle wall of partition, was preparing many a heart among the Gentiles to receive the knowledge of his great salvation.

It is certain, however, that Cornelius was a pious man ; for he feared God, and exerted his influence to train up his family in the fear of God : he, moreover, evidenced his piety by his alms, and by maintaining the habit of daily prayer. All this may be admitted ; but that an angel should have appeared unto him at one of

his seasons of devotion, is a singular circumstance : nor could we easily accredit it, were it not that Peter and Cornelius, though previously strangers to each other, met, by acting according to the supernatural directions which they had separately received—so that we cannot throw discredit on one part of the narrative without rejecting the whole. Besides, the centurion's vision was not a dream. It occurred about the ninth hour of the day—toward eventide ; and it was with his bodily eyes that he saw a man in bright clothing, and heard him distinctly pronounce his own name. It is not surprising that his first emotion bordered on fear, nor that he should have immediately inquired the purport of so extraordinary a visit. “Thy prayers and thine alms,” replied the heavenly visitant, “are come up for a memorial before God. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter : he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea-side : he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”*

It may be asked, what necessity there was for any supernatural errand to Cornelius for such a purpose. Peter himself might have been sent, and he, an inspired apostle, might have readily told the centurion in what light his prayers and alms were regarded, and whatever was incumbent on him to do in the way of his salvation. This is true ; but the centurion would not then have had that confidence in Peter that was necessary under the circumstances, nor that clear and certain evidence that it was his duty to act according to the apostle's instructions.

* Acts x. 4–6.

Aside from this, a new and most remarkable era was about to open on the history of both the church and the world—the introduction of the gospel to the Gentiles. *Here* was the first Gentile to whom it was to be preached : and in this *fact*, we are furnished with the reason why an angel was commissioned to visit Cornelius. But in order to this great end, certain timeworn prejudices were to be overcome, certain erroneous notions to be rectified, and certain fundamental principles to be made known and established. It might be expected that the eye of the Christian church, in all coming ages, would look back to the history of the first Gentile convert, and by it be governed in its views of what is essential to the Divine acceptance, and what kind of instrumentality God employs in the work of man's salvation.

The *principles* which this narrative embodies will necessarily lead us to certain important conclusions. For example—that the ministry of the word is the grand instrumentality for bringing men to the saving knowledge of the truth. Originating with the great Head of the church, it bears the impress of his authority, enjoys the promise of his presence, and the aids of his Spirit : “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature ; and lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.” Hence, having established the Christian ministry, the Lord Jesus did not so much as intimate his will to Saul of Tarsus, though he had miraculously arrested him ; but sent him to be instructed by Ananias—thus honoring, that all might honor, an instrumentality of his own appointment. In like manner, the angel might have told Cornelius all

that was necessary for him to know, in order to his salvation ; but instead of this, " Send men to Joppa," said he, " and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter," and "*he* shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do." And why did not the angel proclaim to him the words of eternal life ? Because, in so doing, he would have exceeded the power of his own commission—thereby trespassing on the prerogatives of the ministry which Christ had instituted.

This seems to us to have been one of the ends which God contemplated in sending an angel to Cornelius—to wit, to show the Gentiles that the ministry of the word is the instrumentality which he has appointed for bringing men to the knowledge and embrace of the truth ; to intimate to men, in all coming generations, that if they desire to know the truth, or are concerned for their salvation, they should send for the ministry of the gospel : and the history of Christianity bears illustrious testimony to this feature of the Divine economy, in the countless exemplifications which it affords us of the unrivalled power and efficiency of the preached word. Where and when is it that the Spirit of God has descended—establishing Christians in their " most holy faith," and turning sinners from " the error of their ways"—but in the place where the preacher stands, and while he is reasoning with men out of the Scriptures, and setting forth in heartfelt language *Christ crucified*, as a Saviour mighty to save ? Other means may serve to enlighten the mind, but none so efficient as this in reaching the heart and the conscience. Even while surrounded by other means of religious instruction,

many a man has vainly sought the peace-giving knowledge of the truth, until some humble minister of the cross has directed him into the way of eternal life. In vain may any one look for the saving knowledge of the truth, unless he comes before God, as his people come, to hear from the lips of his servant all the words which God has commanded. In vain do we send abroad our bibles and tracts, unless we send also the *living* preacher of the gospel.

By such remarks, we do not unduly magnify the Christian ministry. No ; we are no advocates for a “succession,” which, if it could be proved to be “unbroken,” has no sanction from the gospel—much less any vital connection with its fundamental principles. We claim not powers with which no man can be invested without either becoming corrupt in his own views of gospel truth, or corrupting others. We eschew all such pretensions, and bear our solemn testimony against them—because they have deluded unnumbered minds into the notion that salvation cometh from the priest, instead of coming from God only. In affirming the indispensable importance of the gospel ministry, we simply mean to assert *God’s supremacy*, and to hold to *God’s appointed instrumentality*. He has committed the excellency of the treasure to earthen vessels, that “the excellency of the power might be of God.”—“It has pleased God by the foolishness of preaching”—not by our receiving absolution from human lips, nor by our receiving the sacrament at the hands of a priest—but “by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe ;” because this is the medium and the only appointed

medium through which God pours the light of truth upon the darkened mind, and bows the stubborn will, and dissolves the heart to penitence, and faith, and love. Thus was it in the days of the apostles—at the period of the Reformation also—and so is it now. On the other hand, facts prove that, where the gospel has not been faithfully preached, *there* Christianity is little else than baptized heathenism; there the religion of the heart has been displaced by the blinding influence of forms and ceremonies; there the people, however they may regard themselves as “the temple of the Lord,” are “ignorant of Christ’s righteousness, and going about to establish their own;” that there the gospel, if faithfully preached, would be hated and reviled!

It is a singular though lamentable fact, that they who claim to be sole successors of Peter, should resemble this apostle so little in their preaching; that instead of proclaiming remission of sin through faith in Christ, they should have anathematized all who adhere to the simple principles of the gospel, and substituted works for faith; and that, even now, they should exalt their polity, their ordination, their sacraments, their ritual, above the importance of the preached gospel, and all essential verities! But though such may aim to exalt themselves, there are who would “rejoice if counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of Christ.” They ask no blind submission to the power of the keys—no prostration in their presence: enough for them, if, in the spirit of Peter, who bade Cornelius rise, they may be the servants of all, for Jesus’ sake. Whatever effort may be made by ghostly ambition to invalidate the gos-

pel ministry, they may say, as Paul himself affirmed, 'We have "received that ministry from the Lord Jesus," and we are "a sweet savor unto God in them that are saved, and in them that perish." '*

It is evident also, from this narrative, that God prefers the offering of the heart to all external forms of worship. It was in accordance with this principle of the Divine administration, that the prayers and alms of Cornelius were remembered before God. Though he had not been circumcised, nor had offered any ceremonial sacrifice, yet he had acted according to the best of his knowledge, cordially and humbly; and therefore his

* Peter's interview with Cornelius proves conclusively, not merely that faith in Christ is the essence of Christianity, but that it lies at the foundation of the Christian church—thus furnishing, if other arguments were wanting, an effectual refutation of the fundamental error of popery. There is no impropriety in referring the word *rock* to Peter himself; (Matt. xvi. 18,) because it is a fact that in one sense the church is built on him; that is, he was the *first* in making known the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. But, in so doing, he laid the foundation of the church among both Jews and Gentiles; and therefore, as the use of the word *rock* by our Saviour follows Peter's confession of him—"Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"—as it is in the feminine gender, and cannot agree with the name of a man—it necessarily refers to faith in Christ, the great truth which Peter believed and confessed. Moreover, as the word *Rock* is sometimes applied to Jehovah, to suppose that it refers to Peter is to transfer to him the attributes of God himself—thus removing the foundations of the church to a mere man; and hence it is that the church is displaced by Peter: and the followers of Peter are instructed to do penance, and count their beads, instead of being told, as he preached to the centurion, to believe on Christ. But that the word refers simply to faith in Christ, is evident from the fact that the keys of the kingdom were committed to Peter. The kingdom is the New-Testament economy, and faith is the condition of an entrance into this kingdom. Peter therefore instructed Cornelius in the way of salvation through faith in Christ, and initiated him into the Christian church; and this was the first act of unloosing and of binding—unloosing from the ceremonial law, from the Levitical priesthood, and from the altar of sacrifice—and of binding him to Christ; and if this was not the fact, then the middle wall of partition is not broken down: we are still in bondage to ordinances.

prayers and alms were accepted, as evidences of his fear of God, and his desire to glorify God. His heart was in his religion ; and if the heart be not engaged in our worship, what can any forms, however solemn and imposing—any sacrifices, however costly, avail in the sight of God ?

Strange as it may seem, the futility of a heartless service, or the acceptableness of a simple heart-offering, was not so obvious even to the Jews—though their Scriptures had unequivocally inculcated the sentiment that “to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams ;” and though it may seem so clear to us as hardly to require a formal notice, yet was it necessary that this *principle* of the Divine administration should be *distinctly settled*.

The efficiency of mere forms has been, in all ages, the delusion of the common mind ; and a mere formal worship is oftentimes the expedient of the deceitful heart to hush the clamors of a guilty conscience. Whatever may be our own degree of light, how apt are we to forget that “God will not be mocked”—that he requires a spiritual offering ! Do we mistake ? How happens it, then, that so many approach God’s holy altar without any preparation of heart ; that some whose lives give no evidence that the fear of God is before their eyes, do nevertheless attend the house of God with regularity, and go through their accustomed forms of devotion with the utmost solemnity of manner ; that they would be more disturbed by any omission of their forms, than if they had been betrayed into some moral irregularity, or sinful conformity to the world ? O vain man ! “I say

unto thee, that except thy righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, thou shalt in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

" God doth prefer
Before all temples, the upright heart and pure."

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."

Had a Jew been asked his opinion of the centurion's religion, he would have branded it with sentiments of no measured reprehension, if not contempt—because the centurion had not offered sacrifice according to the law of Moses, and moreover was himself a Gentile, being not a child of Abraham, and having no fellowship with the Jewish synagogue! Such, indeed, was the bigoted impression of Peter himself; and it was not until God had spoken *thrice* to Peter, that even he could be induced to act contrary to the prejudices of his education.

Here, then, we arrive at another principle—a principle which the Jews had lost sight of; which the apostles themselves were slow to admit; which religionists in every age are too apt to overlook. We are surprised that the Jewish mind could have been so blinded by prejudice; that they who had heard the Master's declaration—"He that believeth shall be saved"—should have contended with Peter for having preached the gospel to a Gentile: but this is not so remarkable as that there are, at the present day, exclusive claims and illiberal sentiments. Some whom we might suppose to be better acquainted with the essential principles of Christianity, go so far as gravely to maintain that the great

Head of the church has confined to them and their successors the legitimate exercise of all ministerial functions ; that the gospel should never be preached, nor the ordinances administered, but by themselves alone ; and that unless one hear the word from their lips, and receive the sacrament from their hands, he is a heathen man and a publican ! But this is worse than Jewish bigotry, and more absurd than even the pretensions of the Pharisees of old. So far from having any warrant from the word of God, such a notion perverts the conditions of salvation, and thus deserves the reprehension of all who love the gospel of Christ. Having its origin in the same feelings which led the Jews to regard themselves as the favorites of Heaven, or to murmur against Christ because he had sat down with publicans and sinners, it develops itself through as many mediums as there are vents for the pride and ambition of the worldly mind. It may be detected no less in the priest who aims to make others admit what he supposes to be the exclusive validity of his own ordination, than in him who claims infallibility from Rome ; no less in the man who hopes in Heaven's favor because of the font at which he was baptized, or the altar at which he received the eucharist, than in those who presume to hope on the ground of their rank and respectability among men.

Show me the man who in no case will take the sacrament out of his own narrow pale, or who complacently thinks that there is no salvation out of his own ecclesiastical enclosure, and I will show you in him one who, had he lived in the days of the apostles, would have looked down with scorn on the simple religion of a

Cornelius—one who has yet to learn the *great principle* which, in Peter's mission to the Roman centurion, is set forth with noontide clearness, that "God is no respecter of persons."

We do not marvel that God should have interposed to make known a principle of such vital importance. Nothing short of this could have dispelled the prejudices which environed the minds of the apostles, and imparted to them views and feelings in accordance with the spirit of the glorious gospel of the grace of God. By it they were emphatically taught that the barrier between the Jew and the Gentile was broken down, never to be replaced; that in God's sight all men are on an equality—none to be saved by external privileges, none to be lost through the want of such privileges; that all men are alike guilty before God; that none have a claim on his favor; and that, if any are saved, it will be by God's showing mercy, not by their asserted rights or self-complacent assumptions.

As acceptance in God's sight did not depend on Abrahamic descent, or on external privileges, so we are taught that it does not now depend on an answer to the question, 'What is our rank in life?' or 'to what branch of the church we belong;' but *on the state of the heart*. "In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him." Hence the importance of such questions as these: 'Is my heart right in the sight of God? Am I giving evidence of my love to God, by my righteousness toward man? Am I living according to that degree of light which I enjoy, and improving my opportunities to the best of my ability?'

Works, however, are not the meritorious ground of our acceptance before God? In the case of Cornelius, they simply proved that he feared and loved God, not that he depended on his morality for salvation. By his works he showed that he was disposed to do God's will; and hence it appears that a *disposition* to do the will of God, as far as it may be known, constitutes the *essence* of religion. Cornelius improved his advantages; and that he was disposed to do the will of God, to the extent of his knowledge, is clear from the fact that, as soon as the gospel was preached to him, he believed. Hence his acceptance, even before the gospel was made known to him—his acceptance through the mercy of that God who “looketh on the heart,” and who knew that he who from the heart feared him and aimed to do his will, was prepared to embrace the message of the gospel. It must be so, from the nature of man's moral constitution, as well as of God's spiritual government. “He who offends in one point is guilty of the whole law;” that is, he violates the spirit of the law, and sins against the authority of the whole law: and, in like manner, he who cordially respects, in any one particular, the will of God, respects and virtually obeys the whole law. Hence, if one conscientiously acts with reference to the Divine will, so far as that will has been revealed to him through the law of conscience, he cannot reject that will when supernaturally enunciated; because the evidence in the latter case is incomparably clearer than in the former—unless it were reasonable to suppose that he whose vision had been bounded by the light of a taper, would not rejoice in the light of the sun.

It is on this ground we indulge the hope that there are some in heathen lands prepared to receive the gospel, because they may have come to a perception of the evils of idolatry, and of the necessity of a purer religion. They may now be acting according to the best of their knowledge ; and if so, they may be accepted—saved through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Blessed thought !—were it not for this, we might be tempted to harbor dark views of God's government. Not that such a thought serves to invalidate the duty of sending the gospel to realms of paganism : on the contrary, it furnishes additional encouragement to publish in all lands the glad tidings of great joy ; while it conveys to us this *great truth*, that all men are to be judged according to the light which they severally enjoy.

It is worthy of remark, that, wherever this disposition to do the known will of God actually exists, there will be no reluctance to embrace the gospel. Men are prone “to walk in the ways of their heart ;” and it is because they will not give up “the world with its affections and lusts,” that they so often withstand the claims of Jesus Christ—not because, like Cornelius, they fear God—proving their deference to his authority, and their regard for his favor, by their prayers and alms.

Show me a man who seriously and candidly avails himself of “the light of Nature,” and you have pointed me to a heathen who would embrace a revelation from heaven with heartfelt joy. Or, show me one who, Cornelius-like, fears God more than the opinion of the world ; who teaches his family to reverence God rather than to conform to the ways of the world ; a man who

daily prays to God, and ministers, out of his abundance, to the relief of the necessitous—and you have pointed me to one who is not too intent on the world to deny himself for the sake of Christ; too proud to learn of Christ and take his yoke; nor so regardless of God's favor, so indifferent to his soul's interests, that he would for a moment reject the message of God's salvation through Jesus Christ: nay, he is now a practical, if not a professed believer.

This, indeed, is one of the great evidences of our holy religion: that they who are disposed to do the will of God—who show this disposition by their fear of the Lord and their departure from evil—are the most thoroughly convinced of its Divine origin, thus corroborating the words of holy writ: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him."—"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God;" and, on the other hand, "they loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

He, therefore, who, amid the light of the gospel, rejects Jesus Christ, cannot reasonably hope in God's acceptance on the ground of his morality. True, the centurion was accepted *before* he embraced the gospel; but it does not follow that one can be saved without embracing it. Where is the proof that Cornelius depended on his morality for salvation? His was an offering of the heart; but even when the moralist enters the house of God, his heart has no connection with his worship. The centurion trained up his family in the fear of God; but the moralist has not even erected the family altar. The former daily prayed to God in secret;

but the latter never retires from the world to his closet, and there, closing the door behind him, prays to that God who seeth in secret. Where is the man who “devoutly fears God with all his house”—a man of prayer and benevolence—who is, nevertheless, resting on his own works for salvation?

They who are wont to rely on their works, are the very men whose works are unworthy of their reliance. They may be moral, according to the world’s low estimate of morality; but the governing motives of their actions have no connection with the fear of God: they may be charitable, but they are not devout worshippers of God. According to the principles of Deism itself, they cannot be accepted; for they neither worship God in spirit, nor aim to do his will to the best of their knowledge.

Cornelius was truly disposed to do the will of God as far as it had been made known to him; and it is on this point that solemn issue might be joined with the moralist. He was disposed to do the will of God, and therefore the *first time* he heard the gospel, he *believed*. As soon as Jesus Christ was offered, he embraced him as his Saviour, and testified his belief in submitting to the ordinance of baptism; that is, by joining the Christian church. But the moralist, though he may have repeatedly heard the gospel, has yet refused to obey; nay, from year to year rejected the gospel: and that, too, contrary to all evidence, all entreaty—at times when perhaps it was difficult for him to stifle his convictions of truth and duty!

What can constitute an essential difference between

Cornelius and thyself, O vain man, if this does not? — His example? have you cited it in evidence that you may be accepted without believing in Christ? *That* unequivocally condemns you : that example will rise in judgment against you, unless you now renounce your own righteousness, and cast yourself, as a poor, lost sinner, on the mercy of God through Jesus Christ — *believing on him* to the salvation of your soul !

THE ALMOST PERSUADED.

IN contemplating the actions of those who are removed from us by either distance or time, we seldom err in our moral judgments ; and, owing to our inability to sympathize with the feelings, or our ignorance of the motives which prompted those actions, we are wont to conclude that had we been in similar circumstances, we would have acted otherwise. Thus, as we go back to the early history of Christianity, and contemplate the character of the Son of God, we wonder that he should have encountered contumely and hate. Our feelings of virtuous indignation rise up against those by whom he was persecuted and slain ; and we have no doubt that, had we lived then and there, we should have ranged ourselves among the followers of the Lamb. Thus, too, as we trace the course of the apostles, and at every step gather cumulative evidence to the fact of the Resurrection ; as we hang on their lips, and witness the wonderful signs by which their doctrine was attested, we are apt to think that, so far from persecuting, we should have protected them ; that if we had not fearlessly espoused their cause, we should not have rejected their testimony with scorn and derision. But if men, through the deceitfulness of sin, are too apt to do even what they have condemned in others, then, to say the least,

had we lived in the days of the apostles, and listened to the preaching of Paul himself, we might have been indifferent, or even skeptical—we might have procrastinated compliance with the claims of the gospel, or at best been only half persuaded to embrace it.

That many to whom the apostles addressed themselves did not believe, furnishes no presumption against the truth of the gospel—unless the fact that men not unfrequently withstand the remonstrances of conscience, and act contrary to their own convictions of right, constitutes a logical objection against the reality of moral distinctions. But it is remarkable that the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, should have given us such a candid statement of the varied results of their preaching.

To the success of all human projects, it is of the last importance to forestall popular opinion; and nothing so effectually subserves this end as the impression that, from the first, it has met with no resistance; that wherever made known, it has been immediately and universally approved. Every human actor is prone to exaggerate the merits of his plan, or the extent of his influence; to preclude doubt, and prepossess the popular judgment, by vaunting his success, or parading the number of his adherents. Various examples might be adduced—from the demagogue who strives to create the impression that the resolutions of an insignificant caucus were the unanimous sentiments of a crowded assembly, down to the empiric who enumerates a multitude of cures by the time his nostrums are ready for sale; or from the fanatic who multiplies converts to overawe objectors, down to the temperance-advocate

whose success is but dubiously gauged by the signatures to his pledge. It is curious to observe what pains some take to represent their success in the most marvellous light; how the advocate of some peculiar dogma will aim to make it appear, even when innumerable facts are against him, that for eighteen hundred years it has been held by the church without dispute! Such is the not unfrequent policy of men to carry their points; such is human nature, in its expedients to compass selfish ends.

But nothing of the kind can be detected in the evangelic narratives. On the supposition that the evangelists were acting for themselves, there was every temptation to both exaggerate and conceal. Could they have enlisted the multitude in their favor, there would have been the less danger to their own lives; and what readier way to secure the reception of their historic writings, than to convey the impression that the followers of Jesus were not the few, but the many; or that all who ever listened to Paul, had yielded to the force of his reasonings, and bowed to the supremacy of inspired truth? How easy had it been for the evangelist, in recording the particulars of the crucifixion, to heighten the injustice of Pilate's sentence, by saying that even the thieves that were crucified with Jesus, saw his innocence and commiserated his sufferings!—but, true to all the facts in the case, they state that, though one of them sided with Christ, the other blasphemed and reviled him. And, in like manner, how easy had it been for one who had more regard for the success of his cause than for truth,—who overlooked means for the sake of an end—to give the most flattering account of Paul's preaching;

and particularly, after stating the miraculous manner in which he was converted, and the power with which he had been endowed of working miracles ! Had the narrator been a mere ecclesiastic, such as either Rome or Oxford has since sent forth to shackle men's minds, he would have made it appear that the whole multitude of Paul's hearers signed themselves with the sign of the cross, or submitted to the regenerative process of baptism ! Or, had any man of ambitious views and sectarian designs drawn up an account of the apostle's preaching, there are a thousand chances to one that he would have carefully avoided all reference to those who might not have been converted, and spoken only of the great number of converts, particularly among the higher classes of society.

Nothing, therefore, impresses me with a deeper conviction of the humility and sincerity of the sacred writers, than such statements as are made in relation to the effect of Paul's preaching on his hearers—to wit, that, though some believed, others believed not : some mocked, others said they would hear him again. Gallio “cared for none of these things :” Felix trembled, but said to him—“Go thy way for this time ; when I have a convenient season, I will send for thee.” Festus told him he was mad ; and, though his argument before Agrippa was most cogent, the learned judge was not fully persuaded to become a Christian.

In such facts might be founded an argument in favor of the authenticity of this portion of ecclesiastical history : but aside from this, had we not been furnished with this inspired account of the early propagation of

Christianity, we might have been at a loss to understand some of the doctrines and some of the results of the preached word. It may suffice, however, for our present purpose, to remark that, from this record of the Past, the minister of the sanctuary may learn not to be discouraged, should some postpone their decision, or even mock; some be indifferent; others regard him as deranged; and others, again, be no more than almost persuaded to become Christians. And, on the other hand, any hearer of the gospel may behold, in this same mirror of the Past, his moral self—the precise effect of the truth on his own heart; and it may be, that in the case of some one of the various characters to which allusion is made in the Acts of the Apostles, he may read his own *destiny*, as shaped by his reception or by his rejection of the message from on high!

We know not what may have been the effect of the preceding pages of this work on the reader's mind. If they have been read with serious interest, we cannot but hope that the conviction has deepened as he has passed from subject to subject, and listened to each response from the sacred oracles that God has spoken unto us in these last days by his Son, and that without him no man can be saved. Shall such a conviction lead to no appropriate and cordial decision? Shall the mind be enlightened with the knowledge of truth and duty, and the heart still cling to a world that knows not God, nor Jesus Christ, whom he has sent?

In conclusion, then, the case of Agrippa,* though it

* Acts xxvi. 28.

it is so familiar, and admits of so limited a train of remark, constitutes an appropriate, nor will it be found a useless, subject of inquiry.

Before him, Festus brought Paul's cause—for what reason we know not, unless he might have been desirous of Agrippa's advice, or that Agrippa himself was curious to see and hear a man whose conversion to the new faith had created such an excitement among the Jews. This is the most probable reason: for, though he had been brought up at Rome, and received signal marks of the favor of Claudius, yet, being a Jew, he must have heard of Christ.

Paul was not on trial: he was to defend himself, or make such a statement of his cause as to enlist in his behalf Agrippa's influence with the emperor. We grant that it was his interest to make out as strong a case as possible; but such a defence could have been made by no one who did not know whereof he spoke, and what he affirmed. It is a statement of facts, but never was a more eloquent statement of facts made by mortal lips. As a defence of his cause, it is at once noble and triumphant. But Paul was actuated by higher sentiments than a mere regard for either his rights or his life. If ever he urged his rights as a citizen, it was that he might go on "to testify to the gospel of the grace of God;" if ever anxious to secure justice in his own behalf, it was that he might "commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Hence his unflinching courage and unwavering fidelity. Before any tribunal, as well as in the synagogue, he is the same man—speaking the same words of truth and soberness;

and thus, while silencing the cavils of his enemies, he carries the conviction of the truth of his message to the heart of his judges.

Such an opportunity for preaching the gospel as he then had was not to be neglected. Having given an account of his life from his youth up ; of the manner in which he was brought to the knowledge and belief of the faith in Christ ; and how he had hitherto discharged that commission which he had received from the Lord Jesus—he is proceeding, with growing energy and zeal, to prove that he had preached “ none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come ”—how “ that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles ! ”—when Festus rudely interrupts him : probably aiming to preclude the effect of Paul’s defence on the common mind ; or, it may be, deeming it not worth while to listen any longer to one whose mind, in his view, had become affected by undue attention to a particular subject. Being a Roman, he had no ideas on the subject of religion separate from the mythology of the heathen ; and regarding that as nothing more than the device of kings and priests for civil purposes, he could not account for Paul’s zeal, much less his belief, except on the supposition that his learning had crazed him. To one who had no true idea of God, and had always looked on the religion of his own country as an imposture, Paul’s doctrine about one Jesus, whom the Jews had put to death as a malefactor, and his story of having seen him, and heard him speak, and received a commission from him to proclaim remis-

sion of sin in his name, must have seemed most preposterous ; and, in this respect, Festus represents not a few of the wise men of the empire, who prejudged, and, by consequence, rejected the claims of Christianity. Even such men as Pliny and Tacitus, in their allusions to the Christian sect, give melancholy evidence that they could condemn a subject which they had not the candor to examine, and denounce those as fanatics from whom they were too prejudiced to learn.

Festus, however, in ascribing Paul's views and feelings to an overheated imagination, was not unlike some at the present day, who, having no comprehension of the nature and claims of Christianity, much less sympathy with its spirit, are wont to look on a devoted Christian as visionary, if not insane ; and who think that any one who would bring them to a sense of their need of such a Saviour as Christ, must be indeed beside himself. Practically, they regard the gospel as a matter in which they have no interest. Never have they taken into serious thought their relations to God and futurity, or their character and condition as lost sinners ; and hence they know not how the mind is necessarily affected when brought under the influence of the great truths of Christianity. To think, to feel, to act, as one should who believes in God and in the retributions of an endless hereafter, and that without an interest in the blood of Christ there can be no salvation from the wrath to come—all this must be strange to him who has never bestowed one thoughtful hour on the great problem of his being and destination !

Paul beside himself ? It is Festus who is not in his

right mind.—Paul mad? It is Festus rather, who, though himself a sinner against God, and in danger of the judgment, has no concern for his salvation! There can be no greater folly than to procrastinate compliance with the overtures of the gospel; but to regard the gospel as too trifling a matter for a wise man's concern, denotes a state of mind more to be pitied than physical madness. Of all men, he acts the most irrationally who, in his devotedness to worldly ends, proceeds on the supposition that the Bible is false, and hell a dream! It is as though one, in the confidence of his own superior judgment as to the termination of his course, and in spite of warnings and the weeping entreaties of friends, should all the while go nearer and nearer the edge of a fearful precipice, never to awake to his delusion until it is too late.

Paul, on the other hand, had come to a knowledge of himself—having learned of Christ. He had consequently left all to follow Christ in the pathway to immortality; and to him no question was so important as the question, ‘What is truth?’—and no interest so great as the salvation of the soul. He believed in God's Revelation, and therefore spoke and acted in accordance with his deep convictions of the truth, and with an eye single to God's glory and man's eternal well-being. His mind was as sound as his heart was true; and he stands as the type of all who have been brought to a right mind as regards their relations to God and eternity. The nearer one approximates to the apostle's thoughts, and purposes, and actions, the sounder will be his views, the purer his motives, and the more benevolent his life.

If but few at the present day can bear a comparison with Paul in his labors and perils, there are many who have the same views of truth and duty, of time and eternity, of God and Jesus, of heaven and hell ; who are swayed by the same motives, and animated by the same zeal for perishing souls—though they may be obnoxious to the same charge which Festus brought against Paul.

Paul and Festus may be regarded as at either extreme of the public mind in relation to the truths of Revelation. The one zealous, through the strength of his convictions ; the other opposed, from the force of his prejudices :—the one anxious to bring all men to the knowledge of the truth ; the other too satisfied with the conclusions of his philosophy, or the vagaries of self-conceit, to take the pains to listen, much less to inquire :—the one overborne with a sense of eternal realities, the other living for self and the world.

Between these, are several grades : the Gallios, who, with unthinking apathy, care for none of these things ; the Felixes, who tremble at the announcement of a future judgment, and procrastinate repentance ; and they who, attracted by curiosity to hear the word, are favorably impressed—or, perceiving that the evidences of Scripture are not to be disputed, and that its truths harmonize with the reason, and meet the wants of the soul, are almost persuaded to confess Christ before men. To the first of these classes may be referred the low-thoughted herd—the muck-rakes of society ; to the second, men whose actions are contrary to what they know and feel to be right, and who contrive to quiet their consciences by virtue of their better purposes one day to be fulfilled ;

while the last embraces persons in some respects different from either of the preceding classes—men who have some knowledge of scriptural truth—who often think of their eternal interests, and are upright in the relations of life—moral and amiable men, useful members of society, and respecters of religion.

This class may be represented by Agrippa. We have no reason to think that his character was stained by vice, or his disposition marred by malign passions. On the contrary, he seems to have been an estimable man—having had an acquaintance with the Scriptures, and a regard for truth and right. He knew that, as there is a God, it is proper to serve him; as the Scriptures are of God, all men are bound to go according to the law and the testimony. He knew, moreover, that the Jewish expectation of the Messiah was not unfounded; nor was he unacquainted with what had occurred in relation both to Jesus Christ, who had been put to death by the order of Pontius Pilate, and to his followers, whose doctrine had occasioned popular tumults in divers places among the Jews.

Paul seems to have been aware of Agrippa's standing and intelligence; and accordingly—instead of arguing the point with Festus, and aiming to convince him that, though he might seem to some minds to be beside himself, yet there was a *method* in his madness—he rebuts his accusation, not so much by the calm and respectful manner in which he denied it, as by appealing at once to the king, in attestation of his sanity. He might have said much in self-defence, or covered Festus with confusion of face; but nothing could have had such influ-

ence over his accuser as this ready and felicitous appeal. It serves to show, not merely Paul's command of his feelings, but his thorough consciousness of the truth of all he had stated ; and not only to remove any impression which might have been made that he was deranged, but to fasten a conviction of the truth of the gospel on the mind of Agrippa himself.

He had spoken with all the self-possession of a man who felt the truth and importance of his cause, and with all the freedom of one who had nothing to disguise, and no secret end to answer. He had spoken of events which were known to all the Jews, and on which no man could have candidly reflected without perceiving their momentous import—which he was persuaded had not been unknown by Agrippa himself. He had spoken in accordance with the predictions of Moses and the prophets, and with the great facts in Christ's history.

‘King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?—that they spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and that they foretold the coming of Messiah? If their predictions have been thus fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus, then it follows that he is the CHRIST : his religion is truth from Heaven ; it cannot be rejected without rejecting God's testimony, and perilling the soul ! Believest thou ? I know that thou believest. Then thou canst not reject Christ without forswearing Moses and the prophets, and resisting thine own convictions of the truth !’

Unable to deny that the argument was valid, and that the prophets had been fulfilled in the signal events which had recently taken place in Jerusalem—so far from

being influenced by Festus's judgment, he candidly owns the impression which Paul's defence has made on his mind: "Almost thou *persuadest* me to be a Christian."

He was convinced of the apostle's innocence and sincerity, saw the conclusion to which a belief in the prophets necessarily led, and was on the point of yielding up his mind and heart to the belief and acknowledgment of the Christian faith: but further than this we have no information respecting him. The probability is, that this was the turning point in his destiny; and that, for certain worldly reasons, he dismissed the subject for the present—but, in so doing, unconsciously postponed it until it was too late to decide.

He was *almost* persuaded: and how many at the present day have been in precisely the same state of mind!

Perhaps the reader can recall his own experience. You might have gone to hear some preacher of the gospel—it may be, from motives of curiosity—to while away an hour which otherwise would have passed heavily, or from a mere desire to gratify taste and vanity. Be the motive what it might, you were worldly in all your views and feelings; it may be, skeptical of Christianity, and prejudiced against those who called themselves Christians. But soon you lost sight of the manner of the preacher, in your growing interest in the matter of his discourse. Though surrounded by numbers, *you* seemed to be singled out and personally addressed. The message referred to you—to your character and condition by nature—your relations to Him

who made you, and would one day judge you for the deeds done in the flesh. You were impressed with a sense of your guilt and danger ; felt yourself not prepared to meet your God in judgment ; that you could not answer the charge of ingratitude to one who had crowned your life with loving-kindnesses and tender mercies, nor the charge of rebellion against his government who had formed you for his own glory. As the preacher went on, he seemed to you as God's ambassador, pleading with you in Christ's stead to be reconciled to God. The truth of God came home to you ; its evidence was too strong to be resisted, and its importance too pressing to be denied : for the first time, you realized the demands of truth ; you felt condemned—your need of an interest in that blood which was shed for sinners—and you were almost persuaded to become a Christian.

The preached word does not always produce this effect ; yet they who have withstood its appropriate influence, may have been affected by some providential event, which, forcibly arresting their attention, naturally suggested to their minds the most serious thoughts.

It was perhaps the death of some friend, whose last hours were those of peace and hope. The death-bed scene was so contrary to his anticipations ; so different from what he might have supposed to be possible ; so strange to one who had no idea of happiness separate from the gratification of worldly desires—that he was led to pause and reflect on the causes of such a scene : how one who knew that he must die, could be so willing to die—to leave all the riches, and honors, and pleas-

ures of the world, and all the endearments of family and friends; that he could have his affections so placed on unseen things, and so deep an assurance of immortal life, and of unending joy in the presence of Christ, as even to long to depart! And while he stood by that bedside, and witnessed the triumph of Christian faith, he felt that there is a reality in religion; and, though he might never have prayed before, the language of his heart then was—"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!"

In another's case, it might have been the death of his bosom companion. For years they had walked along the path of worldly pursuits. The instructions of their childhood were forgotten; the counsels of age disregarded; the sanctuary was deserted, and the Sabbath profaned. Religion was the last thing they would need, or care for. The world lured them on: the morrow will be as this day, or yet more abundant—when suddenly, as by a stroke of lightning, the one is stretched in the arms of death! Appalling spectacle!—enough to awaken any impenitent man to the folly, the *madness*, of trifling with the concerns of his soul!

It is not without an influence on him who is spared. With what emotion does he gaze on the pale features of his companion, who but yesterday was so full of life and hope—so thoughtless, too, of his supreme interest—alas! wholly *unprepared* for death. And while

"his hopes and fears
Start up alarmed, and o'er life's narrow verge
Look down—on what? A fathomless abyss,
A dread eternity! how surely his!"—

should he fail to heed this solemn warning—while he recalls the long-neglected instructions of God's word, and again hears the Saviour of sinners calling unto him in accents of tenderest entreaty—"Turn ye, for why will ye die?"—he is almost persuaded to become a Christian!

In like manner, some have been brought to the same state of mind when they were prostrated by sickness, or exposed to imminent danger: for a time the attraction of the world ceases—death and eternity stare them in the face! They feel that they have sadly neglected their highest concernment, and are almost persuaded.

Thus are there instances of the same convictions and the same promptings during a period of unusual attention to religion. They who have withstood both the admonitions of a parent's love, and the entreaties of a faithful preacher, have at last been affected by the thought that others around them—perhaps some of their friends—were making their peace with God, or rejoicing in the hope of his pardoning mercy. They have said to themselves: 'Here the Spirit of God is, of a truth. This or that one cannot be acting a part. Nothing short of God's Spirit could have changed his heart, and led him to renounce the world. They have left me; still, they pity and pray for me! And shall I stand out against the demands of truth, and neglect this the day of my merciful visitation? Shall so many be taken, and I left to perish in my sins?' And thus, under the influence of such peculiarly solemn and affecting scenes, he is almost persuaded to become a Christian!

We might advert to the persuasive influence of a

“communion season”—though they who do not profess to be Christians, too often intentionally absent themselves from the house of God on such occasions; or, if they attend, retire before the “communion service” begins. This is an unfavorable sign—to my mind, painfully significant of their unbelief; not merely that they have “no part nor lot in the matter,” but that they have never seriously reflected on the fact that, without an interest in Christ, there can be no deliverance from the condemnation of God’s holy law. Perhaps the reason for their retiring is, that there is a something in the administration of the Lord’s supper which tends to dissipate the delusions of a false hope; which intimates to them that they have no warrant for hope so long as they knowingly violate the Saviour’s dying injunction; and which forces on their minds a sense of their ingratitude to Him who poured out his soul unto death that they might live: a something, too, in the outward separation which then takes place between God’s visible people and the people of the world, which disturbs their consciences, by forcibly reminding them of that separation which will be effected at the last day!

If we are right in our surmises, they who are conscious of such suggestions are not mistaken. The Lord’s supper presents a solemn scene. It is a standing proof of the truth of that gospel which Paul preached in the hearing of king Agrippa. It was instituted to shadow forth, down to the end of time, the death of Christ, as the Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world, and typified in the first acceptable sacrifice that was ever offered by fallen man to the offended

majesty of Heaven.* It is the passover of the present dispensation—the spiritual feast upon the one great Sacrifice. It was designed, moreover, to unite all his followers in a visible bond of faith and love, of peace and joy; and it will be observed until Christ come, in the glory of his Father and with all his holy angels, to separate between him that served God and him that served him not.

How expressive those simple elements—carrying the mind back to the scenes of Gethsemane and of Calvary—where Jesus sweat as it were great drops of blood—where he was nailed to the accursed cross! and then forward to the scenes of that day when he who hung on the cross will come to decide the destinies of men and angels! How intimate the connection between the remembrance of him at his table, and union with him by a world-renouncing faith!—between confessing him before men, and being confessed by him before the holy angels!

Amid the solemn silence of a “communion season”—while the emblems of the Saviour’s broken body and shed blood are distributed to the company of the disciples, and each one is left to his own devout reflections—a still small voice has been heard by some one of the spectators, accusing him of having too long turned his back on the Saviour—trifled with the influences of God’s gracious Spirit—knowingly neglected his duty—and voluntarily separated himself from God’s covenant people! And while he felt that he was without excuse for having neglected such an opportunity, and the thought seriously weighed on his mind that *another* opportunity

* See pages 24, 25.

might not recur, he was almost persuaded to become a Christian.

But why were not such fully persuaded and fixedly resolved?—for although, under similar circumstances, many have become Christians, yet the class of persons to whom we have referred are now no nearer the kingdom of God than they were before. In Agrippa's case, it was owing perhaps to the force of lingering prejudice, to his reluctance to be associated with the despised followers of the Nazarene, to the pride of rank or the love of office, or to the persuasion that there was time enough to come to a decision. And it is owing to causes not unlike those which operated on the mind of Agrippa, that many who have been similarly impressed, have not yet become the willing followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is the love of some sin that always leads the sinner to hesitate. There are the sentiments of false shame, because he himself may have sometimes scoffed—the allurements of worldly pleasure, the promptings of ambition, or the whispers of avarice: there is the conscience-quieting suggestion that he may be as good as Christians themselves—better than some who name the name of Christ; and, though last, not least in its influence, the ever-besetting impression that the present is, after all, not so favorable for a decision as some future time will be: and in one or the other of these dispositions and suggestions of man's depraved heart, we may discern the reason why they to whom we have alluded were not fully persuaded.

We attach but little importance to the supposition

that they might not have had all the evidence for the truth they deemed necessary, or that their minds were embarrassed by speculative difficulties : still less in relation to those who have enjoyed all advantages for mastering the evidences and understanding the doctrines of the Christian system. “The lusts of the flesh” often sway the mind’s decisions ; and, that we do not err in ascribing even speculative difficulties, as well as procrastinated compliance with the conditions of the gospel, to the force of pride, of passion, or of prejudice, might be shown by an appeal to all who have become Christians.

There is scarce one who knows not, from his own experience, how great is the reluctance of the “carnal mind” to give up all for Christ ; what a conflict ensued the moment truth gained a lodgment in his conscience ; how he had to contend with the love of some sinful pleasure, with the aspirations of ambition, with the desire of becoming speedily rich, with the allurements of luxurious and fashionable life, or with the skeptical suggestions of an evil heart ; how at one moment he was influenced by the fear of shame, and again by a false pride ; now tempted to think that religion is a delusion, and then, when convinced of his guilt and danger, tempted to delay. Yes ; and perhaps how long was his struggle against “the world, the flesh, and the devil ;” how he kept aloof from wonted scenes and engagements, lest his mind should be diverted ; how, at last, he sought the converse of some man of God, that he might make known the state of his mind, and be directed aright ; how he feared that he might rest satisfied, for the pres-

ent, in being almost persuaded; how he fell on his knees, and confessed his besetting sins to God, and prayed that he might be enabled to forsake every sin—that no wonted allurements, no selfish and worldly motives, might interfere with his full persuasion of the truth, his acknowledging of the same, and ranging himself on the Lord's side.

But what a state of mind is that to which we have referred; how full of interest to angels as well as Christians; how pregnant with vast results! It is then the dying sinner comes to himself—to a conviction of his true character as a fallen being, and of the wants and woes of his moral nature—his need of pardon, purity, and peace! He begins to see that the favor of God is worth more to him than all the objects to the acquisition of which he had been so long devoted; begins to feel for the safety of his precious, undying soul! it may be, trembles for his salvation! Trembles?—well he may. He stands, as it were, midway between Christ and the world—between heaven and hell. He cannot remain where he is: he must go forward, or he will go backward; must yield to his convictions, or stifle them; embrace the truth, or seek some refuge of lies; give up his sins for Christ, or Christ for his sins!

Hence his greater danger; because, being almost persuaded, he may be tempted to think that there is at least safety in such a state, and that he may at any time come to a decision. But not so: any delay must be attended with awful hazard to the soul. The fact of having once acted in direct opposition to the clear and strong convictions of duty, lessens the probability that

he will ever be influenced in the same degree by the like convictions. If he can now withstand the clearest evidences, the most effective motives, and the most touching appeals ; if neither the force of truth, nor the threatenings of wrath, nor the promises of mercy, nor the penetrating sense of his own guilt and danger, nor the dread possibility that his day of grace may end with the going down of the morrow's sun ; if none of these considerations can induce him to give up the world and follow Christ, is it reasonable to expect that he ever will be fully persuaded ?

He may think that he is unfavorably situated for a decision, or that his worldly avocations are too urgent to be postponed : such is apt to be the infatuation of the dying sinner, even when brought to this crisis in his history. But were he only honest with himself, and true to his highest welfare, he would forego all worldly interests rather than procrastinate his decision. The world will never appeal to him with less force than it does now ; and, by a moral necessity of his nature, he will become more wedded to self and sin, and more averse from God and duty.

Here the teachings of experience preclude theory, and the warnings of facts supersede the necessity of argument. The skeptical may yet be convinced—the immoral convicted—the indifferent aroused from their fatal lethargy ; but he who can rest satisfied for the present in being almost persuaded, is hardening his own heart : the process may be gradual, but it is sure—as has been exemplified in the case of many an aged worldling.

Nor is it difficult to account for this on scriptural principles. Can any thing short of a Divine influence turn men from nature's darkness into the marvellous light of the gospel? Were not these convictions of truth and duty wrought in that man's mind by the Spirit of God? was it not because God's Spirit strove with him, that he was so deeply affected by the truth, and concerned for his salvation? Yes; and it is as true that God's Spirit "*shall not always* strive with man."

Strange, indeed, that any one who has been brought to this state of mind, can *rest* until he comes to a decision! Of what use is it to be no more than "almost persuaded?" And should death come upon one in an unexpected hour, what alleviation could it be to reflect—rather, what an aggravation of his misery would it be to recall the fact that, while enjoying all the lights and privileges of the gospel, he was *almost* a Christian! Infinitely better to live and die a heathen, than live and die *all but* a Christian!

Here, then, we take our leave of the reader—not without the hope, however, that if he is a Christian, he will be led to prize more than ever "the faith once delivered unto the saints;" if he is not, that he will reverently listen to the voice which now sounds, in warning accents, from the depths of the Sacred Oracles: "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart."

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